

A  
0  
0  
0  
6  
7  
4  
3  
4  
0  
5



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

**ANNEX**

ART  
UNIVERSITY OF  
CALIFORNIA  
SAN DIEGO

Rev. James A. Hurley



James A Hurley

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

#14604

# LECTURES

ON

# ENGLISH LITERATURE

BY

MAURICE FRANCIS EGAN, LL.D.,

LATE EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK FREEMAN'S JOURNAL, AND PROFESSOR OF  
ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME.

---

NEW YORK:  
WILLIAM H. SADLIER,  
11 BARCLAY STREET.

COPYRIGHTED, 1889,  
By WILLIAM H. SADLER.



# DEDICATION

TO THE PUPILS, PAST AND PRESENT,  
OF CATHOLIC COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS  
IN THE UNITED STATES,

*THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.*

COPYRIGHTED, 1889,  
BY WILLIAM H. SADLER.

# DEDICATION

TO THE PUPILS, PAST AND PRESENT,  
OF CATHOLIC COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS  
IN THE UNITED STATES,

*THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.*



# CONTENTS.

---

## LECTURE I.

Literature as a Factor in Life, . . . . .	PAGE I
---	-----------

## LECTURE II.

Chaucer: Some Glimpses of his Time, his Life and his Friends, . . . . .	22
--	----

## LECTURE III.

The Real Meaning of Æsthetics, . . . . .	41
--	----

## LECTURE IV.

Southwell, Crashaw, and Habington, . . . . .	61
--	----

## LECTURE V.

An Introduction to the Study of Tennyson, . . . . .	88
---	----

## LECTURE VI.

Two Dramas by Tennyson and Aubrey De Vere, . . . . .	110
--	-----

## LECTURE VII.

Some Women Writers, . . . . .	132
-------------------------------	-----

## LECTURE VIII.

Literature and Manners, . . . . .	164
-----------------------------------	-----



## LECTURE I.

### LITERATURE AS A FACTOR IN LIFE.

THERE are two extremes from which Literature is regarded in these days. From one point of view it is looked on as the only thing in life worth living for; from the other, as a mere ornament, a distraction,—an amusement for an idle hour.

The disciples of what is called Culture,—a term which like the adjective *æsthetic* has suffered grievously by misuse,—place Literature above Dogma. That is, they hold that a human being may be able to get enough vital consolation out of books to do entirely without the teachings of the Christian religion. Blasphemously they group the sacred Scriptures, the Koran, the Buddhistic writings together as great works of literature. Thomas à Kempis and the author of “Paul and Virginia,” St. Paul and George Eliot we find jumbled together by the cultured,—with a capital C—who recommend books to the “masses.”

Matthew Arnold's name is known to all of you. He died recently. He did more to inculcate in the minds of English-speaking people a love for Literature for the sake of itself than any other man living or dead. He was a poet, but not a great one. He cultivated the art of using words

to the utmost extent possible in a man of his temperament. He wrote at times exquisitely. He was an intellectual aristocrat, and we cannot but admire the position he took above all low, vulgar and common things. But, nevertheless, his life-long cultivation of the art of literature led to nothing, because it did not lead to God. Literature is a factor in life, and an important one in all well-regulated lives, but it is not the end of life. God is the beginning and the end.

The effect of Matthew Arnold's teachings may be traced in a recent popular novel, "Robert Elsmere." The author of it is Mrs. Humphrey Ward. It has succeeded Rider Haggard's "She" and Robert Stevenson's "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" in the estimation of the thoughtless reader. Why? Because Mr. Gladstone reviewed it in *The Nineteenth Century*. There is no getting over the fact that English opinion still sways our judgment in literary matters, although the West is more independent and American in this respect than the East.

This winter "Robert Elsmere" has become the talk of all the drawing-rooms. Ladies who read it because it is the fashion speak learnedly about the impregnable position that Theistic teaching holds in the world of science. I heard one the other day, and I asked, as politely as possible, what she meant. She did not answer; but I knew she had been reading "Robert Elsmere." Next summer when you are in the country, at the watering places, or at home, you will find the ladies, old and young, discussing "Robert Elsmere," and probably some of you will read it



yourselves. Therefore, as this book is to-day, and will perhaps be to-morrow, a topic of general discussion, I am glad to have the opportunity of warning you against its tendency. It is not immoral, as one late notorious story by a woman is immoral. But it is immoral in an intellectual sense. It is false, because the author pretends to a first-hand knowledge of things which she has evidently taken at second-hand. And all pretence in large or small things is more or less immoral.

"Robert Elsmere," as I said, is the result of that theory of life which makes Literature the end, the support, the consolation of life. This was Matthew Arnold's theory; this is the theory of those of his cult who substitute culture for faith and lucidity, sweetness and light,—which words are the slang of culture,—for the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. This novel teaches that through the increased keenness which the study of Literature has given us, we may pierce the past, and, by the light of our study of literature, discover that the teachings of Christianity have been mistaken from the beginning, and that our Lord was only man, not God; and that God Himself is only a mere vague name!

This is the result of that devotion to culture which Matthew Arnold considered the best thing in life, and the result of his belief that religion and science might fail, but that poetry, as the consoler and the elevator of man, could never fail. This is the teaching of a novel which is read to-day by every half-educated man and woman in this country of half-education.

You see that, since Literature has such an influence in moulding the ideas of men and women, even concerning the beginning and the end of all things, it is a very important factor in life. There are intellectual people, like Matthew Arnold, among men, and among women, like Mrs. Humphrey Ward and Vernon Lee, who overrate the value of Literature and who put it in place of religion.

"No young man," says our old friend, the estimable Duke of Omnium, in Anthony Trollope's novel, "should dare to neglect literature. At some period of his life he will surely need consolation; and he may be certain that, should he live to be an old man, there will be none other, except religion." The Duke of Omnium, however, is not of our time; it is not strange that he is puzzled and bewildered by the breadth of view which permits agnosticism as a decoration to the real business of life—enjoyment—and denies none of the pleasant vices to exalted gentlemen, or none of the picturesque frailties to no less exalted ladies. Were the worthy duke abreast of the age, he would not except religion, for it has become an axiom with the most exact thinkers that culture is the highest and best thing in life; and what is culture, judged by their standard, but the art of reading in perfection? Matthew Arnold comes as near blasphemy as any man can in this period, in which the saying of smart things about the Creator has come to be regarded as a mark of much wit, when he places poetry even above science as the consoler of men.

"Without poetry," he asserts in a preface to Thomas Humphrey Ward's admirable work, *The English Poets*—which is the text of

this article,—“without poetry our science would appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science, I say, will appear incomplete without it. For finely and truly does Wordsworth call poetry ‘the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science’; and what is a countenance without its expression? Again, Wordsworth finely and truly calls poetry ‘the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge.’ Our religion parading evidences such as those on which the popular mind relies now; our philosophy pluming itself on its reasonings about causation and finite and infinite being—what are they but the shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge? *The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted them, for having taken them seriously; and the more we perceive their hollowness, the more we shall prize ‘the breath and finer spirit of knowledge offered us by poetry.’*”

The day has come when men, reared among the shams of Protest, have turned away from the weak support of an emasculated religion to seek rest in a philosophy which offers no certitude, and in a science which is only half understood. They stretch out their hands for bread, and the priests of culture give them a stone.

Poetry, exalted, God-inspired as it is, interpreter as it is of the voiceless messages that man and nature hold for each other, fails when we go to it for that consolation which all men crave some time or other, and without which the highest attainment is valueless—that consolation which the soul craves, and craves more strongly, when it has conquered the intellectual world and reached its *ultima thule* of culture. At a certain time in his life the French poet, Maurice de Guérin, found what he deemed consolation in resting against the trunk of a lilac in his garden, “le seul être au monde contre qui il pût appuyer sa chancelante nature, comme le seul capable de supporter son

embrassement," in the struggle between pantheism and faith that was going on in his soul. Poetry must fail those who go to it as a last resource, as the lilac failed De Guérin. It is the experience of men in all ages that hearts only can comfort hearts; that the purest abstractions are cold and unsatisfactory. Humanity that can console humanity must be, itself, yet higher than itself. The Church offers, not poetry, but the Sacred Heart.

Goethe did not find consolation in poetry or the highest flights of his intellect, and Matthew Arnold, the most polished and complaisant of the priests of culture, is not, it would seem, free from that divine despair in which we may imagine Sappho looking from her rock. Poetry is a seraph on whom the light of God falls, but poetry is not God. Poetry may bear the soul to supernal flights, but it cannot give rest, serenity, hope, which make consolation. It ever asks that "Why?" to which religion gives an eternal answer.

The Scriptures contain great poems—the greatest poems; but he who, reading them, tries to eliminate the Godhead of Christ loses himself in what Ruskin calls the *verde smalto*—the helpless green of the Elysian Fields. Homer, cold and joyless, offers no consolation; Horace and Theocritus are without joy in their *verde smalto*. Roses and wine soon lose their savor, and the cicada is only harsh when the heart is sad. Christianity gave to poetry all its joyousness, all that sympathy with men and nature which makes us glad. Poetry no longer echoes the sea-like moan of restless souls, as in Homer; it inter-

prets and elevates, as in Dante. It is impossible to divorce Christianity from the poetry that is nearest to us. Christianity has made it what it is. It was not till after the Resurrection that the spring clothed itself in gladness. The rain came and departed, and the voice of the turtle was heard in the land; but the full glory and gladness of the spring did not make itself known to the human heart until after the first Easter. Who, going to Shakspeare for consolation, is not referred to Him who is beyond? And where is the sublimity of Dante without the Divine Persons from whom that sublimity radiates? Such poets as Swinburne and Gautier cannot escape from the light of the cross. Their paganism is not the paganism of the Greeks; they cannot bridge over the stream that flowed from Calvary. The light deepens their shadows. Their effects are in *chiaro-oscuro*, and this has given them that vogue for which they sacrificed so much.

On the other hand, there are many,—the vast majority in fact,—who look on Literature as only an ornament of life,—a polite accomplishment, or the amusement of an idle hour. Among these I am forced to class a great number of young women. And, referring to them, I should say idle hours rather than an idle hour. For of those who regard Literature only as a diversion, the greatest number read novels. I must elaborate this assertion still further and say devour, instead of read.

If you have ever had the opportunity of seeing certain people, who have only five minutes for refreshments, trying to lunch at a railroad station while the train is waiting,



you have an impression of how the young woman who is devoted to novels takes her mental food. Once, far down in Texas, I had the fortune to witness a process of this kind. The traveller,—a hungry one,—made a dash at the pickles because they were nearest. Then he crunched until a bilious-looking mince-meat pie caught his glare. He bolted the pie and then swallowed a plate of pork and beans. He was stuffing a ham sandwich into his mouth when the bell rang and, I feel sure, he was saved from sudden death.

The reader who looks on Literature as mere amusement generally acquires the habit of bolting novels as this traveller devoured his food. I have met young ladies who claimed to have read ten novels in a week! They, when cross-examined as politely as possible, acknowledged that they did not remember the characters in any of them. They had a dim impression that Lady De Vere had married the Duke of Something-or-Other; but whether Angelina, the heroine of "Wedded on a Fatal Night," was a creation of "The Duchess's" or "Ouida's" or "Bertha M. Clay's," they really did not know. One young girl had,—she confessed without apparent shame,—read six of "The Duchess's" novels in one week and was looking for more! This was during the vacation time. And the week after this, I saw her sitting on a piazza at Long Branch, with one of Rhoda Broughton's near her, just finished, Haggard's "She" and an utterly wretched work called "Miss Middleton's Lover." Her mother did not seem to mind it. But I think that both mother and daughter were to be pitied.

The reading of novels,—and worse than worthless novels,—was this young woman's way of making use of Literature. If she were told that she was as absurd a figure as the man who munches pie and pickles, pork and beans and oysters at the same time, she would be indignant, and yet she does a similar thing without a similar excuse. The novels of "The Duchess" are like a very light kind of confection with a drop of poison here and there in it and a great deal of opium well disguised by the experienced cook.

If there were no harm in them, these novels would be as unhealthy as a constant diet of pies and caramels and pickles would be.

Physical food is a great factor in life, so is mental food. The mental system is as capable of derangement through bad mental food as the physical system. Let anybody who doubts this, analyze his or her state of mind after the reading of a carelessly written sensational novel. It leaves him in a dream. It has paralyzed his powers of thinking and acting. It leaves in him a distaste for more solid mental food. The inveterate novel-reader cannot be induced to read history, a volume of fine essays, and a book of devotions is impossible to him. He has created a false appetite. He will henceforth have only condiments. He will take the horse-radish, but not the roast beef; the mustard, but not the cold ham; and the cranberry sauce, but not the turkey.

Short novels are only condiments, or bits of ornamental confectionery which are as fatal to the machinery

of the mind, when habitually used, as caramels and *nougat* would be to the machinery of the body, if they were indulged in as a steady diet. Thackeray, one of the greatest of English novelists, was once asked if he had read a certain new book,—“I bake cakes,” he said, “but I eat bread.”

You can easily prove to yourselves the truth of what I say. Can any of you read “Ben Hur,” or “Dion and the Sibyls,” or “Fabiola,” without experiencing an exhilaration of good purpose? One must be very impassable—very void of fine feelings,—if one does not have all good resolves helped by such books. After reading such books it seems easy to suffer and to die for the right. And if the young man must dream, let him dream that he is Pancratius or Ben Hur,—let the young girl dream that she is Fabiola or Esther. And yet dreams are dangerous. They may become our masters before we know it. If we dream great things, we may realize them, but they must be things that strengthen and elevate our minds. It is only by strengthening the good in us that we can grow into our best selves. Literature is such a strong factor in life because its influence works in us unconsciously to ourselves. If we only knew how much our actions in supreme moments of life,—in times of crisis—depend on the little thoughts and acts that preceded them, we should keep vigilant watch on the little foxes that make way through the gaps in our hedges. It is the carelessness of venial sins that make mortal sins easy. We, in this world, are like the violins in a great orchestra. If we are not



kept in tune, we lose in fineness of quality and, when the Great Leader of this wonderful earthly orchestra waves His baton, we are found wanting; we make discord. To be at our best always, we must keep ourselves in tune with the best of the instruments near us. And the best of these instruments are good books.

They are true friends. We can always have them with us. As a clear-sighted writer says, they never take offence, they never betray our confidence, they are ready to counsel, to interest us at any moment. They have no moods. A word from them often falls into our minds like a stone into a clear pool. It makes ripples that reflect in prismatic hues the face and the sun of heaven. No; we must not underrate the influence of books. And in these days when it is truer than it was in Solomon's time, that of the making of books there is no end, we must be careful how we choose our books. Bad books have ruined as many men as bad whiskey, and sentimental love stories have made as many women useless and unworthy of their high destiny as evil companions. The mission of women is the highest mission on earth. When God sent His Son on earth He intrusted Him to the care of her—the Virgin—blessed among women. Women, as mothers, as teachers, by precept, by example, rule the world. Therefore, they owe to themselves, to society, to God, to make themselves worthy of their vocation.

There have been women, like George Eliot and George Sand, who held Literature to be the best thing in life. There is a woman writing to-day who holds the same

opinion. Her name is Vernon Lee, and all her knowledge and all her literary skill are wielded against God. The life of George Eliot shows that genius and the finest literary skill cannot compensate for the loss of God as revealed by Himself. Her life was sad, as you can see by the letters which her husband, Mr. Cross, has left us. Practically rejecting Christianity, she committed a breach of morality for which her greatest admirers dare not apologize. You see that Literature without God does not make men and women virtuous. For without God it is only part of itself. Cardinal Newman well says that a university without a Chair of Theology is incomplete. It is so with Literature. Literature without Christ is futile. So futile is it, that all poets since the time of Augustus are, in spite of themselves, Christian in their best moments.

Even George Eliot could not escape the charm of St. Teresa. Her imagination clung to the proud figure of Savonarola, though I could not advise you to take her view of that great monk's character, or of Charles Kingsley's Cyril, in his novel of "Hypatia." She made a noble picture of Florence. And, in "Daniel Deronda," a fine defence of the Jews. That, I think, was the most Christian thing she ever did. For we owe our morality, our Christianity itself to Hebrews, as well as the highest literature we have, the sacred Scriptures. It was a Christian act to recall this, and Christians are unworthy of the name who are not willing to acknowledge their obligation to that grand old race.

Some of you may say that you cannot read Dante; that

Shakspeare is too heavy; that Milton seems like a task; that even the Vicar of Wakefield and Rasselas tire you. Then I say that you are a bad case of mental dyspepsia. You must take a course of reading which will be a tonic; but for very shame you must learn to like good books.

When I see, in the street cars of a large city, working girls going home at night, each carrying her luncheon-box and a paper-covered novel, when this novel is usually "Molly Bawn," or the "Fatal Wedding," by Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, or "Miss Middleton's Lover," by that trashiest of all story-writers, Miss Mary Jane Libby, I can find much excuse for them. They have worked hard all their lives. They have had no chance to know better. Their taste for good books has never been cultivated. At best, they have gabbled through the perfunctory lessons of a public school, and completed their education by the reading of the newspapers, and taken a post-graduate course with the assistance of "The Duchess," "Ouida," and Bertha M. Clay.

Are we to tolerate this kind of reading among young gentlewomen, who have every advantage of education and culture? If they leave school without a taste for good books, "classic books," your education has been a partial failure. It is your mission to lead, not to follow,—to set an example of the cultivation and grace which should belong to a gentlewoman in these days. And every year the world is becoming more exacting. We, in America, are passing beyond the brick and mortar epoch; we are becoming more highly civilized and more exacting. Men

are no longer satisfied with ignorance and a brownstone house, nor with bad pictures in rich gold frames, nor with carved book-cases and nothing in them. Similarly, they judge education by a higher standard. And, as you grow older, young ladies, you will find that a mere smattering of literature will satisfy neither yourself nor your friends. "To ask a man or woman," says Frederick Harrison, "who spends half a life-time in sucking magazines and new poems, to read a book of Homer would be like asking a butcher's boy to whistle the 'Adelaïde.'" This is true; transient, periodical literature is a bane of our civilization. Now, I suppose you may consider me snobbish for introducing Mr. Harrison's butcher boy. You may say why should not a butcher boy whistle the Adelaïde? Well, there is no law against it. And if the butcher boy is virtuous and cultivated, he is as good a gentleman as anybody in the land. There is no aristocracy, except the aristocracy of virtue and cultivation. As Tennyson says,

"'Tis only noble to be good."

But, remember, that one must in this country be educated as well as good. You may be descended from all the kings on earth, you may be rich and "prominent," and be everything that answers for rank in this country; but without cultivation,—which presupposes a taste for and a knowledge of Literature,—you can never be gentlewomen. We may say what we please; we may hunt up our coats of arms and our crests, and our cousins may even marry foreign titles; but, in our hearts, we know it is all a sham. In this country, the only aristocracy is that of the heart and

the head,—of character and acquirements. We cannot make it otherwise, unless we make the country over again, and blot out the Declaration of Independence.

People who read only the lower books acquire false ideas of life. And as most of these lower books are reprints of worthless English novels, we find that our young people found their ideas of life on the English plan. They know all about vicars and squires and young curates who play lawn tennis; they tremble with delight when the heroine refuses a baronet and accepts a duke. They learn to love a title, and they dream of a time, when, entering society in a new gown made by Madame Elise or Worth, the music stops, for the musicians are so charmed by their beauty that they cannot play. And then the young duke or the young lord asks them to dance and they float away, etc., etc.

“ They live in Greece,  
And die in peace,  
And are buried in a pot of ashes.”

You know the usual ending. The music does not stop in real life. Nor do we find young dukes or young lords prowling about in this country, unless it is for their own country's good. And, even the young duke, if he were the sort of man painted in the novels, would expect something more of his wife than that she should let down her hair and play the harp, while the ambient clouds, tinged with the rosy light of sunset, approached the golden sun as if weeping for the glamour of some lost planet.

Forgive me this digression. I have written novels my-



self. That is why I know so much about them. And nobody can say of me that which is sometimes said of your reverend instructors,—“What does *he* know about novels?” I know a great deal. I have written novels myself, but I have reformed.

Let me tell you how I made novels. First, I must ask you not to misunderstand me. A *great* novel,—like “Fabiola,” “Ben Hur,” “Lorna Doone,” “Esmond,” “Dion and the Sybils,”—is a gift of God. But the average novel is generally a gift of the devil. My novels were something between the two,—purgatorial. I mention them here, to show you that the novelist very often smiles at the ignorance of his audience, and regrets the necessity of writing trash for them. My novels were written when I was a young man. To be frank—and I say *mea culpa*, *mea culpa* in parenthesis,—they were written for money. This was the *modus operandi*. My publisher said: “This is the first of December, we want a novel by the middle of January.” “Very well,” I said. “The fashion in novels now is that the hero should be a tall light man with side whiskers and a frank open smile that shows rows of glittering white teeth, and that the heroine should be short, with scornful, curling lips, black hair, and eyes that reflect the light like shimmering waves when the silver rays of the moon fall first upon it.” “Very well,” I said, “how much?” Of course, the publisher did not like this interruption; but I always settled that first before we thought of the love story at all. “It must be a novel of society.” “Very well,” I said. “There must be dukes and counts

and lords in it." "Of course," I answered. "And above all, Mr. Egan," he would end solemnly, "the dresses must be described." This filled me with fear, but I never showed it. "And, if you expect to make money out of it, there must be plenty of action."

I was just twenty years old at this time. You may imagine how competent I was to write of life. But I went on with the story. Love, murder, suicide, bankruptcy, grief, despair, were easy to me. But when it came to the question of women's gowns, I was unhappy,—very unhappy. I went to a fashion plate for consolation and instruction. It was worse than a meteorological map. But I saw a number on the margin, and this number was duplicated in the body of the fashion plate. The number was 27,—it ought to have been thirteen, for thirteen is said to be an unlucky number. After 27 was written these words: "A pink polonaise," and then some obscure directions. After careful reflection, I came to the conclusion that it was some graceful article for the neck,—a sort of a *fichu*. How could an unfortunate bachelor know better? And so I wrote: "Mabel turned pale at her mother's words; and, in her agitation forgetting the presence of the gay throng around, threw her polonaise upon the ground and fainted away."

The critics very soon taught me what polonaise meant. I know it now.

As I said, I went to work at my novel. My plan was to send the publisher two chapters every day. He responded to the first instalment by a slip of paper on which

was written "more action." I understood what he meant. He wanted a few more murders and a suicide or two. I put in more action. The next day there came another note, "more action." The heroine then refused five offers of marriage and I made the villain,—a gentleman with green eyes "which shone with the glint of emeralds in Cimmerian darkness,"—poison his grandfather and kidnap his two nephews. And I said to myself: "the publisher will be satisfied now." But he was not. Though you may think it strange, he was not. Again, after reading this chapter of horrors, he sent me another demand for action. I plunged into work again. And when the chapter was finished, the stage was as well covered with corpses as it is in the last act of *Hamlet*. But this did not satisfy him. You can imagine my feelings! Action! I plunged into horrors. I left my hero hanging to the brink of a precipice by his finger-tips, while he strangled a boa-constrictor with his toes. And, after all this, there came in response, a slip of paper from the publisher on which was written "more action!"

I went to the publishing-house in a state of disgust. I saw the office-boy. "Where is Mr. So and-So?" "At Newport." "And Mr. Thomas So-and-So?" "At Newport, too." "And the junior member of the firm?" "At Newport, too." "How long have they been away?" "Oh, about ten days!" "How can Mr. So-and-So have written these notes, then?" "Oh," said the office-boy, "*he* wrote them before he left; he left orders to have them sent to you every day."



This is an example of how novels are written by machinery ! It shows, too, how much reliance is to be put on the average novelist's pictures of life. I was just twenty years old when I wrote a financially successful novel. I shall not tell its name, because I am not proud of it. But all the young ladies read it in 1872. They thought, no doubt, that I knew life very well. You would have fancied that I floated on the crest of the most exalted society; that I knew nobody less than a duke; that I spent my life in one round of polite dissipation; that I was a very sentimental person. But in reality, I spent my time in studying very hard, and I seldom went out at all.

Do you see how the books which form our young people's views of life are made ? At the risk of seeming egotistical, I have given you my experience. Mr. Nugent Robinson, who writes such charming things in the *Ave Maria*, once told me that he had longed to meet a certain famous novelist. He had at last an invitation to an assembly at which she was to be present. He yearned for the moment to come; it came, and the famous author, whose sentimental and poetic descriptions of love and life had entranced, was in the act of drinking what the English call a pint of half-and-half. The foam which clung to her lips was not that of sibylline inspiration, but of prosaic porter!

And yet this lady's novels are devoured with avidity by people who take all their ideas of the refinements of life from her! Do not put your trust in the average novelist.

For the sake of the tone of your mind, for the sake of your style in writing, do not look on Literature as a mere distraction. They say,—I do not know how true it is,—that if one writes with lemon juice on a blank sheet of paper and, at some time after, hold the sheet before the fire, the writing will appear distinctly. And so it is with what you read in youth. It may seem to have no effect; but when the fires of the world try you, this apparently colorless writing blazes out and helps to direct your actions in moments of temptation.

Choose a few books. Keep them with you. Read them often. Acquire a taste for them. Be satisfied with nothing but the best. Begin by reading some parts of the Sacred Scriptures. For, apart from its being the Word, there is no higher poetry on earth than Isaias, no higher prose than the parables of our Lord. Then we have “The Following of Christ,”—a book recognized even by infidels as a masterpiece. Think for a moment of the measureless influence which these books have had on the lives of millions. Take lower books,—take great novels like that of Sir Walter Scott, take Robinson Crusoe,—which, by the way, is not a book merely for children. A great philosophy underlies it. It shows what a man, by exercising the energies God has given him, may do. It is a prose epic on the triumph of mind over matter. “The great masterpieces of the world are thus, quite apart from the solace they give us, the master instruments of a solid education.”

If you leave school without a taste for good books, your

education has partially failed. And so exacting has society become, so important is Literature in life, that if you look on it as a mere amusement,—a light and trifling amusement,—you will have deep regrets your whole life long.

## LECTURE II.

CHAUCER;

SOME GLIMPSES OF HIS TIME, HIS LIFE AND HIS FRIENDS.

I have chosen Chaucer as the subject of this lecture, because he is really the father of English poetry, and because the consideration of his works gives us an opportunity of corroborating a theory which ought to permeate all our studies in English literature.

This theory,—which is amply supported by facts,—is that all English poets, from Chaucer to Tennyson, from Milton to Longfellow, from Shakspeare to Aubrey de Vere, owe all that is best in them to the inspiration of Christianity; and when I say Christianity, I mean the highest form of Christianity—the Catholic Church.

We all know only too well that the English language is the language of anti-Catholicism, and that its literature has been for almost three centuries a conspiracy against the Church. But, still, I insist that I can prove that the most glowing, the most exaltedly impassioned, the most noble passages in the greatest of English-speaking poets derive their light from the halo that surrounds the doctrines, the practices, the legends of the Christian Church.

There is no doubt that Geoffrey Chaucer, the father of English poetry, was a devout Catholic. Hundreds of

passages in Shakspeare could be quoted as evidence of the Catholic feeling, if not the Catholic Faith, of that great master. Milton glorified Satan; but yet Milton owes the whole frame-work of his "Paradise Lost" to the theology of the Church. As to Tennyson, who would dream of comparing the sentimental whining and complaining of "Maud" and "Locksley Hall" with the serenity of the "Idyls of the King," when the effects of Catholic tradition fall like the rosy glow of dawn on the pure marble of a Corinthian temple. Who can think of the penitence of Guinevere in the convent, or the speech of King Arthur to Sir Bedivere,—that most exquisite passage in Tennyson,—

"If thou shouldst never see my face again,  
Pray for my soul,"

without admitting that the spirit of the Church has triumphed in English poetry despite the conspiracy of the English language against it; for, in Longfellow's masterpieces, is not the greatest "Evangeline?" and in Aubrey de Vere—a writer whom I most earnestly recommend to you, we find a perfect synthesis between the highest religious idea and the highest poetical embodiment of it. It may startle some of you to hear the name of Aubrey de Vere mentioned in the same breath with that of Tennyson. But, remember, I am not here as the follower of any other critic. And I do not ask you to follow me blindly; but I insist that we Catholics—we Christians—shall in literature, as in all other sciences and arts, lead, not follow. We have inherited the glory and the wealth of all the ages. Let us, then, not accept the standards

which an alien world has made for us. "*In hoc signo vinces*"—By the sign of Faith we conquer, and by the sign of Faith we lead. We have no need to be afraid of the truth, and no need to be afraid of falsehood.

For a long time, the writers of literary text-books have told us that Chaucer was a Wycliffite—a follower of an unfortunate man who wanted to put the fallible authority of human judgment in the place of the infallible authority of the Church. In truth, so settled had become this opinion among even men of letters, that, to my amazement, one of the cleverest authors of my acquaintance said, in answer to an assertion of Chaucer's Catholicity: "You, Romanists, are claiming everybody."

Now it is our business to displace so far as possible the fallacy that Chaucer was a Wycliffite, a Lollard, or a member of any sect. We owe this to the interests of truth and to the memory of a poet who, however short he fell of what ought to be expected of so well instructed a man and so great a poet, was true in his best moments to the Church.

I do not ask you to read all of Chaucer. Indeed, I think it is wise that you should read only parts of his works. But the parts that your instructors select for you are the best parts, and you lose nothing by missing the others. Chaucer, repentant for the license of some of his poems, wrote:

"For he shall find enough, both great and small,  
Of storial thing that toucheth gentleness,  
Likewise morality and holiness;  
Blame ye not me, if you should choose amiss."



But the poet could not thus thrust the responsibility for his bad work on the reader. We will act on his advice, and avoid all that repels us. The good in his poems is more than enough.

Chaucer, like most poets, borrowed the plots and sometimes even the words of his poetical stories from older poets. He gave us the foundation of our language. Dante, in Italy, made by his works one language out of the many diverse dialects of Italy. Before the author of the "*Inferno*"—who owed as much to Catholic theology as to himself—consolidated the melodies and harmonies of the Italian tongues into one language, the Lombards, the Neapolitans, the Piedmontese, the Florentines, the Pisans, the Genoese, had their dialects, and a poem written in one dialect was not understood by the people using another. Dante changed all this: he made one grand language for the whole of Italy; so Chaucer unconsciously imitated him. Before Chaucer began to write, the English was despised. The learned wrote in Latin or Norman-French; but Chaucer touched what appeared to be common earth, and behold! a clear stream gushed out—"a well," as Ben Jonson has it, "of English undefiled."

He borrowed much from the Italians, and we have to regret that, in taking some of his stories from Boccaccio, he took some of the licentiousness of that unhappy storyteller.

Chaucer's life covered the last half of the fourteenth century. He died in the last year of that century. His latest biographer—Mr. A. W. Ward—says that the life of

the poet covers rather more than the interval between the most glorious epoch of Edward III.'s reign—for Crecy was fought in 1346—and the downfall, in 1399, of his unfortunate successor, Richard II. Under this king occurred that horrible war of the peasants, who were urged to the general destruction of all existing institutions by the teachings of Wycliff,—the chief anarchist of his time.

It would be silly to deny that abuses in religious discipline did not exist in Chaucer's time. But the Church was, and is always, the same. Some of the religious, and many of the people, had begun to love wealth and ease more than the cross of Christ or the honor of His Blessed Mother. The poison in the nation's blood, which made it delirious in the reign of Henry VIII., had already begun to work in that of Edward III., and the poet's quick insight into the abuses which were sapping the spiritual strength of the people have caused many critics to set down Chaucer as a follower of Wycliff. But these critics are filled with the idea that Henry VIII. discovered religion.

I am sorry to see that even the amiable Miss Mitford applauds Chaucer for his heretical tendencies. Miss Mitford ought to have known better. I hope I may digress enough to ask you to her delightful sketches of country life. "Our Village" and "Belford Regis" are as fresh and sweet as the English daisies, whose praises Chaucer sings in "The Flower and the Leaf." There are not many people who read "Belford Regis" or "Our Village;" but I hope you will revive a taste for them, and,



living in the country as you do a great part of the year, you will find them very charming.

Nevertheless, it is very hard to forgive Miss Mitford for thinking that Geoffrey Chaucer reviled the Church in which he was baptized, and which he loved. An impartial examination of his writings will show that Chaucer, like all true Catholics of his time, saw that pride and luxury, sloth and simony, hiding under the desecrated cloak of religion, were, like moths, separating the threads of the sacred garment.

As England grew prosperous, the king, the nobles, and even a few priests, defied Rome more and more. And it is an axiom that the farther any Christian nation gets from the salutary influence of the Pope, the nearer it gets to Anti-Christ. In England, there were religious who loved Cæsar more than God, who loved their wealth and the whims of their king more than the Vicar of Christ. An example of this we see later, in the fate of Cardinal Wolsey.

In reading such portions of "The Canterbury Tales" as your judicious teachers may choose for you, you will perhaps wonder why the pilgrimage resembled more a picnic than a sacred procession to a venerated spot. But these pilgrimages had degenerated; and their character may be shown from the act of an archbishop, in refusing his blessing to a company of pilgrims, telling them that for sinners without contrition there were no indulgences at the shrine of St. Thomas. Of true priests and true religious there were many; and they, seeing that the laxity of

some of their brethren would lead to disaster, redoubled their good works. But the abuses and the defiance of Rome brought down the curse of heresy on the English people.

Like most poets, Chaucer demanded more of the ideal from the world than he was willing to put into his own practices. His ridicule often played about abuses more from wantonness than from any desire to amend them. Vice was picturesque; therefore he painted it. He seems half disgusted, half amused by the evils of his day. He never rises to righteous indignation. He is always reverent to the Church and her dogmas. His faith in our eyes may seem childlike; in his time it was only manly.

No poet, except Shakspeare, reflected more than a phase of his century, and Chaucer could not reflect fully the various tendencies of his time. If our poet had always been as moral in his stories as he was firm in his faith, we might have even greater reason to be proud of him. That his better training led him to feel ashamed of the immorality that stains some of his pages is evident from the apology he makes, and from the contrite prayer he appends to "The Canterbury Tales." Had the age been utterly vicious, Chaucer, not having the present moral world in view, would scarcely have thought it necessary to apologize. The description of the poor parson does not strike us as containing anything unusual, and Chaucer to-day might find many like him among our priests:

"A good man was ther of religioun,  
And was a poure persoun of a toun ;

But riche he was of holy thought and werk  
 He was also a lerned man, a clerk,  
 That Cristës Gospel trewely wolde preche ;  
 His parischens devoutly wolde teche.  
 Benigne he was, and wonder diligent,  
 And in adversité ful pacient ;  
 And such he was i-provëd oftë sithes,\*  
 Ful loth were him to cursë for his tythes.  
 But rather wolde he yeven, out of dowte,  
 Unto his pourë parischens aboute  
 Of his offrynge, and eek of his substaunce.  
 He cowde in litel thing han suffisaunce.  
 Wyd was his parische, and houses fer asonder,  
 But he ne laftë not for reyne ne thonder,  
 In sikenesse nor in meschief to visite  
 The ferreste in his parische, moche and lite,  
 Upon his feet, and in his hond a staf.  
 This noble ensample to his scheep he yaf,  
 That ferst he wroughte, and afterward he taughte,  
 Out of the Gospel he who wordës caughte,  
 And this figure he addede eek therto,  
 That if gold rustë, what shall yren doo ?  
 For if a prest be foul, on whom we truste,  
 No wonder is a lewëd man to ruste ;  
 And schame it is, if that a prest tak keep,  
 A [filthy] schepherde and a clenë scheep ;  
 Wel oughthe a prest ensample for to yive,  
 By his clenness, how that his scheep schulde lyve.  
 He settë not his benefice to hyre,  
 And leet his scheep encombred in the myre,  
 And ran to Londone, unto seyntë Poules,  
 To seeken him a chaunterie for soules,†  
 Or with a bretherhede to ben withholde ;  
 But dwelte at hoom, and keptë wel his folde,  
 So that the wolfe ne made it not myscarye ;  
 He was a schepherd and no mercenarie.  
 And though he holy were, and vertuous,  
 He was to sinful man nought despitous,

\* Ofttimes.

† An endowment for saying Masses.

\* Ne of his spechē daungerous\* ne digne,  
 But in his teching discret and benigne.  
 To drawē folk to heven by fairnesse  
 By good ensample, this was his busynesse:  
 But it were eny persone obstinat,  
 What so he were, of high or lowe estat,  
 Him wolde he snybbē scharply for the nonēs.  
 A petter preest, I trowe, ther nowher non is.  
 He waytede after no pompe and reverence,  
 Ne makede him a spiced † conscience,  
 But Cristēs lore, and His apostles twelve,  
 He taughte, but ferst He folwede it Himselfe."

His fervent "Orison to the Holy Virgin," beginning—

"Mother of God and Virgin undefiled,"

is earnestly Catholic; and in his "A B C"—a translation from the French—there is an address to the Blessed Virgin in twenty-three stanzas, each of which begins with one of the letters of the alphabet arranged in proper succession. St. Charles Borromeo did not go outside the Church in his attempt to bring her unfaithful servants nearer to her, and Wycliffe, had he helped to revive that faith which negligence, avarice, and luxury were gradually weakening in the hearts of Englishmen, the best men in England—and our poet among them—would have been with him. But with heresy Chaucer had no sympathy. In the "Parsones Tale" he exclaims against the doctrines of Wycliffe and the spoliation of church property; and if there were the slightest doubt in the minds of careful readers, the "Prayer of Chaucer" at the end of "The Canterbury Tales" shows he died a devout Catholic.

Chaucer's English is to Dante's Italian what a bagpipe

---

\* Haughty.

† Nice, fastidious.

is to an organ; but there is a direct simplicity about Chaucer to which Dante never attained. Compare, for instance, Dante's version of the "Story of Ugolino" with Chaucer. Chaucer revered this wise bard of Florence; but in borrowing the "Story of Ugolino," he treated it with more simplicity than that divine poet. It is a good example of Chaucer's peculiar qualities. In tenderness and humanity it far exceeds Dante's version.

Chaucer owed even more to the French *trouvères* than to the Italians. It is said that he met Petrarch in Italy. His life was not unworthy of a poet, being at the end serene and peaceful. Chaucer married, about 1369, a lady named Philippa. It is possible that the favorite flower of this lady may have been the daisy, for Chaucer sings of this simple flower in the prologue to the "Legend of Good Women," and in "The Flower and the Leaf." His refrain is:

"Si douce est la Marguerite."

His "marguerite" was not our field daisy, but the pink and white many-petalled flower we find in old-fashioned gardens. His most famous work, "The Canterbury Tales,"—stories told by pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket,—were written in the comparative ease of his later days. Most of his life was spent at court. He was page in Prince Lionel's household; he served in the army, and was taken prisoner in France; he was squire to Edward III.; he went as king's commissioner to Italy in 1372; he was controller of the customs of the port of London from 1381 to 1386; he was a mem-

ber of the House of Commons for Kent in 1386, and in 1389 clerk of the king's works at Windsor.

His contemporaries appreciated his genius. Gower says that all England knew his fame; Lydgate calls him "noble;" Occleve names him "the first finder of our faire langage." The Scotch poets, beginning with James I., were enthusiastic about Chaucer.

Chaucer adapted the "*Roman de la Rose*." Dryden later, attempted a similar task,—the adapting of Chaucer; but the bloomlike expression is wanting. Most of us will always know Chaucer but through Dryden and Pope; for our century has small patience with diction that requires a glossary. But Pope's "*Temple of Fame*" is merely a parody. Chaucer in sword and periwig was about as poetic a sight as a young faun in the dress of our decade.

When the mellow light of sunset fell on the poet, his lines were cast in pleasant places. He was poor, and yet serene of mind. It is easy to imagine him: grave, yet with a twinkle in his eye, talking, rosary in hand, as he is represented in a picture, with the blind poet Gower, the philosophical Dominican Strode, the youthful Lydgate, or Occleve, who furtively sketched a portrait of his master on the margin of a precious book. He died in peace with all the world. Would that he had written no line we would wish to blot!

Langley, or Langland, who was contemporary with Chaucer, does not seem to have felt his influence. "*Piers Plowman*" is the work of a visionary brooding over the wants of the people, who turns at last from the picture of



an ideal reformer to come to the Saviour who had already come. Langland, in his earnestness, high purpose, and seriousness, is in striking contrast to Chaucer. "*Piers Plowman*" is in the unrhymed alliterative metre of the older English period—almost the only metre that can be called English, as Mr. Skeat remarks in his sketch of Langley,\* since all others have been borrowed from French or Italian.

Of him whom Chaucer and Lydgate call the moral Gower—though his best-known work, "*Confessio Amantis*," would to-day be considered anything but moral—very little is known. He seems to have been born in 1330, and to have died in 1408, having been blind for eight or nine years before his death. He was a gentleman of an old family owning estates in Kent and Suffolk. The place of his birth is unknown. He probably died in the priory of St. Mary Overies, Southwark, in the church of which—now called St. Saviour's—his tomb may be still seen. It is not known when his first work, "*Speculum Meditantis*," written in French verse, was composed. The second, "*Vox Clamantis*," in Latin elegiac verse, was written between 1382 and 1384. The third, "*Confessio Amantis*," was written, owing to the success with which Chaucer had wielded his "*langage faire*," in English. The grave and moral author mixes up Christianity and paganism in the most astonishing manner in "*Confessio Amantis*," and, strange to say, he seems altogether unconscious of the incompatibility of these elements. Religion

---

\* "*The English Poets*," vol. i.



and passion change places with much complaisance, and the impartial reader is reluctantly forced to conclude that the "moral Gower" had an amazing faculty for mixing things up. He possessed no spark of that genius which illuminated everything that Chaucer touched. "Florent," a story in the "*Confessio Amantis*," is not without merit. Its moral is that

"Allé women most desire "

to have their own way. After a long dialogue, Florent yields his will entirely to that of his wife.

Chaucer and Gower were intimate friends, but they had a quarrel which was, however, made up. There is evidence that Chaucer called one of Gower's tales "corsed," which, if it means "sensational," shows that Gower had an abnormally forgiving and unpoetical spirit.

John Lydgate, another of Chaucer's friends, seems to have been stimulated to write by the example of his master and by his love for the French poets of his time. To Chaucer we owe the fact that he wrote in English. At his best he reflects his model, for whom he cherished the profoundest admiration, and whom he was proud of imitating. His first long poem, "The Storie of Thebes," written when he was nearly fifty, he represents as a new Canterbury Tale told by himself after he had joined the company of pilgrims at Canterbury. In it he uses the ten-syllable rhyming couplet after the manner of Chaucer in "The Knightes Tale." Lydgate had a remarkable faculty of versification, but he lacked the force of Chaucer. There are passages full of spirit, followed by long stretches

of dreary verse-making. Another important poem was the "Storie of Troy," begun about the year 1412, at the request of Prince Henry, afterwards Henry V. The prince asked that Lydgate should do the noble story of Troy into English, as other poets had done in other languages, and Lydgate complied. He finished the fifth and last book in 1420. It is written in the ten-syllable couplets, and founded on Guido di Colonna's prose history of Troy. In the third book, where the story of Troilus and Cressida is introduced, Lydgate seizes the chance to pay an ardent tribute to Chaucer. His versification, although he had evidently mastered his art as far as it went, is often rough. "If the structure of the lines is attentively considered," says Mr. Thomas Arnold, who writes a notice of Lydgate in "The English Poets," "it will be seen that he did not regard them as consisting of ten syllables and five feet, or at least that he did not generally so regard them, but rather as made up of two halves or counterbalancing members, each containing two accents. Remembering this, the reader can get through a long passage by Lydgate or Barclay with some degree of comfort; though if he were to read the same passage with the expectation of meeting always the due number of syllables, his ear would be continually disappointed and annoyed. This vicious method of versification was probably a legacy from the alliterative poets, whose popularity, especially in the north of England, was so great that their peculiar rhythm long survived after rhyme and measure had carried the day."

Lydgate, although a monk ostensibly, belonging to the monastery of St. Edmund at Bury, does not seem, from his own account, to have done much credit to his calling:

“Of religioun I weryd a black habite,  
Oonly outward by apparence.”

Toward the end of his life, however, his mind took a more edifying turn, and he composed a metrical “Life of St. Edmund” and the “Legend of St. Alban,” which raised him much higher in the estimation of his good brothers the monks than all his idle tales of Thebes and Troy. Lydgate’s most notable work was “The Fall of the Princes,” founded on a French version of the Latin treatise by Boccaccio, “De Casibus Virorum Illustrium.” The title-page of this poem, in nine books, printed in folio in 1558, sufficiently explains the subject. It runs: “The Tragedies gathered by John Bochas of all such Princes as fell from theyr Estates throughe the Mutability of Fortune since the creation of Adam until his time; wherin may be seen what vices bring menne to destruccion, wyth notable warninges howe the like may be avoyded. Translated into English by John Lydgate, Monk of Burye.” Lydgate is at his best in this poem; he uses the seven-line stanza, and gets nearer to the ease and liquidity of versification which distinguish Chaucer. Of his minor poems, “London Lickpenny,” which describes the trials of a penniless wanderer in the great metropolis, gives a very vivid idea of the sights and sounds of the London streets:

“Then unto London I dyd me hye  
Of all the land it beareth the pryse :

‘ Hot pescodes,’ one began to crye,  
 ‘ Strabery rype, and cherries in the ryse’;  
 One bad me come nere and by some spyce,  
 Peper and safforne they gan me bede,  
 But for lack of mony I myght not spede.”

Of the poems of Thomas Occleve, who wrote “*De Regimine Principum*” in 1411, the address to Chaucer is the most beautiful. He reflected rather than originated; his work shows at times a charming simplicity and lofty religious feelings; but it is dwarfed by comparison with that of the poet, whom he calls—

“ O maister dere and fader reverent,  
 My maister Chaucer! floure of eloquence.”

Occleve was born between 1365 and 1370; it is believed that he lived to a great age, but the precise date of his death is unknown.

Robert Henryson is the brightest light among the stars that circled in the train of Chaucer. Of him little is known. It is certain that, in 1462, he was incorporated of the University of Glasgow, and that he was afterwards school-master in Dunfermline, and that he worked there as a notary public. Henryson was a true poet, and he possessed what we call to-day a feeling for his art in a high degree. His narrative is gay, easy, rapid; his touch light and vivid, and his dramatic power, both in dialogue and construction, is not surpassed by Chaucer. His verse is musical and well weighed; he liked to try his hand at new refrains, strange metres, and unexpected rhymes. His dialect, to the modern eye and ear, is almost incomprehensible, but long study and great love will show him

who cares to search that Henryson used it as the old composers used the harpsichord. It is an instrument of narrow compass, yet capable of exquisite harmonies under the hand of a master.

“To know the use he made of it in dialogue, he must be studied in ‘Robyne and Makyne,’ the earliest English pastoral; or at such moments as that of the conversation between the widows of the Cock who has just been snatched away by the Fox; or in the incomparable ‘Taile of the Wolf that got the Nek-Herring throw the Wrinkis of the Fox that Begylit the Cadgear,’ which, outside La Fontaine, I conceive to be one of the high-water marks of the modern apologue. In such poems as ‘The Three Deid Powis,’\* where he has anticipated a something of Hamlet at Yorick’s grave, as ‘The Abbey Walk,’ the ‘Garmond of Fair Ladies,’ the ‘Reasoning Between Age and Youth,’ it is employed as a vehicle for the expression of austere thought, of quaint conceitedness, of solemn and earnest devotion, of satirical comment, with equal ease and equal success.”†

There are delightful touches of fancy in all Henryson’s poems, which the dialect in which they are written prevents us from quoting. To most of us Burns requires a glossary; and, therefore, Henryson’s mixture of old English and Scotch would be hopeless in an age when he who reads runs.

After Skelton—who, by the way, resembles Rabelais more than the centre of our circle—a great change took place. Poetry took a tinge from the new creed, and lost much of its gayety, and that quality which is called *naïveté*, in consequence. Stephen Hawes, a disciple of Lydgate, wrote in 1506 “The Pastime of Pleasure, or the Historie of Graunde Amoure and La Belle Pucel.” It is an alle-

---

\* Skulls.

† The English Poets.

gory, describing how Grande Amoure makes himself worthy of perfect love—La Belle Pucel. Hawes had no small share of the divine fire, though his narrative and descriptions are often dull. Hawes imitated Chaucer less than those who preceded him. There is no new ring in his verse which forebodes the new epoch at hand. He wrote at least one couplet that deserves to live:

“ For though the daye be never so long  
At last the belle ringeth to evensong.”

James I., the author of “The King’s Quari,” who, with Dunbar and Gawain Douglas, reflected the light of Chaucer, was the first Scottish poet to lighten the fifteenth century. Dunbar, a strong and virile poet, born somewhere in East Lothian between 1450 and 1460, hearing the mutterings of the coming storm, put his thoughts into verse which stamps him as an earnest Catholic, and which have been called by a competent critic “the finest devotional fragments of their age.” Gawain Douglas, Bishop of Dunkeld, and son of the famous Earl of Angus—“Beil-the-Cat”—who boasted that none of his sons except Gawain could write, made a translation of the “Æneid” which cannot die; but he was a *dilettante* rather than a genuine poet, and he gladly dropped the pen for politics, which desertion ultimately caused him to be exiled to London, where he died in 1522.

When Hawes died, Chaucer’s daisies were left to wither until Burns tried to revive them; but they were never the same. Only he who sang “*si douce est la marguerite*” can worthily, of all poets, wear that symbol of freshness



and simplicity which the early poets, loving him well, lauded in those "merrie" days before men had learned to doubt and to resolve the Almighty God who made them into "the unknowable."



## LECTURE III.

### THE REAL MEANING OF ÆSTHETICS.

THE word "æsthetics" is from the Greek. It describes that science which discovers the beauty in art, in literature, in nature, and in life.

No word has been more misused and degraded. When Oscar Wilde came hither he took advantage of the American tendency to imitate the English by carrying false æstheticism to its utmost length. He donned knee-breeches and long hair. He told the ladies what they should wear with the solemnity of a prophet. He made the sunflower and peacock feathers fashionable, until the rage for household decoration has become so great that the very dust-pans blossom in sunflowers, and only lately one walked over, sat in, and looked at peacock's feathers until they produced the effect of sea-sickness. They became as common as the imposing horsehair-covered furniture of older times, from which one slid off with more ease than grace. Just before and just after Oscar Wilde's advent, everybody talked of "æstheticism" without really knowing what it meant. And to-day the word is used by the newspapers and by people in ordinary conversation as if it meant something eccentric, strained, affected.

Now it means nothing of the kind. It has a sane and

good meaning, and one which we ought to understand thoroughly before we begin to study literature, art, music. To be an "æsthete" is generally understood to be a long, lank creature,—if it be a woman,—with a straightly flowing gown, of the color of faded oak leaves, with a weird, "intense," look and a habit of falling into "stained glass attitudes." Bunthorne, in the opera of "Patience," is the type of the male "æsthete,"—the man with hanging locks, who wears a sunflower in his button-hole, who worships the lily, and who tries to live up to a Japanese teapot.

This kind of æsthetics is very easily acquired. It is the vulgar kind. It is well exemplified in one of De Maurier's pictures in the *London Punch*. "Who are those queer-looking girls?" asks Mrs. Jones of her children. "They are the de Cimabue Browns," responded Ethel Jones, "they are very æsthetic." "So I thought," answers the mother; "are you acquainted with them?" "Oh, no!" cry the little Jones in chorus, "they are intensely æsthetic, and they stick out their tongues if we only look at them!" One of the first laws of modern sham culture is that the tongue shall be stuck out in an æsthetic manner! After that the rest is easy.

To be cultured,—I am speaking of the sham culture which is fashionable among superficial and hollow-hearted people,—you must have a *cult*, an intense worship of something or somebody. The neophyte of culture may select Donizetti, or Dante Cavalcante, or the piper that played before Moses. He may take his choice, and must find in his cult intense spiritual meanings, poetic insights,

grand possibilities of passion and color, infinite perspective and *chiaro-oscuro*. It is the mission of culture to see the unseeable and to know the unknowable. The more of the unseeable you see, and the more of the unknowable you know, the more cultured you will be.

"Culture" ignores morality. To talk of morals in connection with art is to place one's self at once among the rabble according to the cultured. To the cultured the Scriptures are a beautiful poem, but nothing more; and the religion of Christ a mosaic of color. The pretense that drives the moral principles from art in its widest sense is destructive of art. Prometheus suffering is devoid of all his grandeur if we forget the higher suffering that surpasses even the pangs of his vulture-torn heart; and what becomes of the inspiration of Raffaele if we see in his masterpieces only the portraits of certain Italian women? It is very well for the cultured to talk of the sublime "nuances of expressiveness that intensify the works of Fra Angelico." But the pictures of Fra Angelico are nothing if not religious. No artist would call him an anatomist, or say that he painted human faces; and it is certainly not very consistent with that eternal fitness of things, of which the cultured continually prate, to put Fra Angelico and Phidias on the same plane. *Bric-à-brac* is the basis of this new movement which is dying out already. If the end of life is to be decoration, life is a very poor thing; and this is the philosophy of culture.

Men of the highest modern culture look back to paganism with longing. The highest compliment that could

be paid to men of this kind is to tell them they are pagans.

The pretender to the highest æsthetics finds hidden meanings and new beauties in bits of prose and verse, which to the uninitiated seem without either meaning or beauty. Sometimes the thing chosen by the "æsthete" for admiration is only the mud of literature. To discover animalculæ in mud may be a laudable and interesting work to a man with a microscope; but to go into spasms of admiration over the hidden beauties of mud and to bespatter the roses of other people is the task of a scavenger smitten with the monomania of his trade.

The world must worship something, and when it has lost the true God, it makes gods of its own, and changes its gods every year. Since morality is nothing and beauty is everything, according to the decree of culture, and to be beautiful is to be true to one's self, it is fortunate that the principles of culture have not yet reached the "masses." The washerwoman, who knows all the points of Carlo Dolce, and thinks Murillo a charlatan in color, will hardly endear herself to the "cultured," if she forget the difference between mine and thine; and the clerk who has his "cult" may deem that the necessities of the beautiful—that is, the developement of all the capacities of his nature—requires the appropriation of a certain portion of his employer's money. In cases like these, the advice of Polonius should be taken with a grain of salt, for the cultured may be "true" to themselves without being true to any other man.

Culture did not save the world. At the height of the culture of the olden time, Christ came down to save mankind. Civilization, like an over-ripe pear, had become rotten. We are asked to accept the body for the spirit; we may grow ecstatic over the carving of a crucifix, but we may not think of the anguish of Him typified; we may cry aloud at the "effects" in a picture by Guido, but we must forget the diviner beauty of the Immaculate Mother; we may admire the "pose" and the "lights and shades" in the hair of St. Mary Magdalen, but we may not remember the Infinite Mercy that forgave her!" Can anything be more false, more degrading than this gospel? Can anything be more hollow, more worthless than the "sincerity" of which the cultured talk?

And yet how many seemingly thoughtful people have adopted the superficialities of this modern teaching. There are to-day men who hold that education and culture will reform the world. That a thorough knowledge of grammar and the study of Shakspeare would thin out the dangerous classes—that if to these requisitions could be added a satisfactory knowledge of the maxims of Emerson and Confucius, the world would become a Paradise, in which everybody would "intelligently" revel in combinations of peacock blue and green, and understand the shades of workmanship that divide *cloissonné* from *champ élevé*. This is the end of culture. After that the—"unknowable!"

A friend writes a description of an "æsthete" of a lately fashionable type. He says:



I once knew a young person full of "æsthetic" feeling of the fashionable kind who worshipped simplicity. He declared that the melodies of Mother Goose were replete with higher meaning. "Oh," he had a habit of saying,—the "æsthetic" movement was then young,—“Oh, if you could only learn to draw into yourself the precious soulfulness of simplicity!” And then he read in his most soulful and intense manner:

“Old Mother Hubbard, she went to the cupboard,  
To get her poor dog a bone.”

He often asked me if I saw the symbolical and magnificent appropriateness of this. I was obliged to confess that I did not. “Ah,” he said, “do you not see that old Mother Hubbard,—oh, sweetly simple cognomen!—typifies the hope of the heart seeking for refreshment in an arid world? She went to the cupboard in the expectation of finding nothing for her own selfish pleasure. No,—she wanted only the inexpressible delight of giving nourishment to a soul, typified by her dog,—that hungered. Oh, exquisite story! in it I read much that the world cannot see. Surely the genius of him that composed such a poem was stronger and simpler than Shakspeare’s.” He found joyous and ineffable meaning in “Little Boy Blue,” and he said that “Old King Cole” was a blast from the silver trumpet of the centuries. I never quite understood him. He thought he was inspired; but most of his friends said that he was crazy. He felt this very much, and I think that it was to show them they were wrong that he

stopped being an "æsthete" and went to help his uncle in a soap factory.

But before that, he had some strange ways. We lived in the same house. He had a picture of Dante, before which he kept a candle burning day and night. And one night when his lamp was lit beyond midnight, the landlady knocked and found him with a lily in his hand by his open window. He told her that the supremest moment of life was when one could see the argent glances of the orb of night through the ambient perfume of stately lily-flower. The landlady frequently said after this that he ought to have a keeper. But, as I said, he went into the soap business. He does not write to me, because he always considered me a Philistine—he called everybody who did not rave about the true, the beautiful, and the simple, Philistines. He once quoted a line from a sonnet, beginning:

"There were no roses till the first child died,"

and he said: "Oh, essence of poetry! there you have expressed a preciousness of exquisite meaning as if a silver streak of dawn had darted into murk from the empyrean." When I said I meant just what I said, he gave me up.

In cultivating a taste for good books, you are cultivating true æsthetics. In cultivating a taste for good pictures, you are likewise doing so. In preferring Mendelssohn's "Songs Without Words" to the "Carlotta Waltzes," you are doing it too. *Æsthetics* really means the calm and reasonable seeking after the greatest things in art, litera-



ture, and music. It does not mean straining after effect; it does not mean attitudinizing and posing and wearing strange clothes just to appear unusual. All that is vulgar for affectation and pretension are always vulgar.

There are Philistines in the world,—people who find no good in anything that is not absolutely useful,—who in the sunset-tinged clouds see only banks of vapor, who value heavy and rich furniture and surroundings only by the show they make. The female Philistine values diamonds and sealskin sacks more than a good book, a great picture, or the power to interpret the meaning of a Mozart or a Schubert. The male Philistine laughs at music and poetry and art and refinement. He sneers at everything he does not understand. If he buys a picture, be sure it is because he wants to boast of its price to his friends. And even then he thinks more of the triple-gilding on the frame than of the genius of the artist. He buys a diamond because it is big and dear. He despises everything that does not represent money. There are some poor Philistines, but they would be three times as vulgar if they were rich. Philistines, rich and poor, male and female, are thoroughly despicable. You see them in large American cities in the winter and at watering-places in the summer,—the men with immense diamonds, the women in the latest fashionable attire. They are like nothing so much as savages to whom a traveller has given a string of glass beads. They are less to be respected than the savage, because they live among shapes of beauty, yet they will see them not. Education with them means accomplish-

ments that will "show off." A simple song well sung is nothing to them. But a bit from an opera, full of cadenzas and trills and *fiorituri* is everything, because it seems to mean the expenditure of so much money.

A poem or a chapter from a great book, read with true feeling and expression, is nothing, though it be the perfection of the art that conceals art. No; they must have passion torn to tatters. Elocution, in its worst sense, is the only kind of delivery they can admire. And then there must be sobs, claspings of the hands, and dramatic attitudes, suitable enough perhaps on the stage of a third-rate theatre, but impossible to people of nice taste in a drawing-room. To the Philistine,

"A primrose by the river's brim  
Only a primrose is to him  
And it is nothing more."

To be what they call an "æsthete" is bad; to be what they call a Philistine is even worse. The "æsthete," after all, can be made to feel so dissatisfied with himself that he will drop his affectations; but the incorrigible vice of the Philistine is self-conceit.

Let us hope that we stand between the two. And if we do not, let us hope that we shall cultivate such a noble dissatisfaction with ourselves that we shall be neither æsthetes nor Philistines. If the sham æsthetic movement, which has now spent its force, did no other good, it at least taught Americans, apt to be very thorough Philistines, that there is a beauty in common things. It made the field daisy and the sunflower fashionable,—too fash-

ionable for our comfort. But, nevertheless, it taught us that the things that were so plenty that they could be had for nothing, had a beauty of their own. If the morning-glory were a hothouse flower, it would seem as precious as the orchids about which the fashionable world is raving.

True æsthetics is the seeking of beauty in the life around us. A Turkish writer has said: "If I had two loaves of bread, I would give one for a hyacinth, for the hyacinth would feed my soul." There is a great deal in that. Who that has watched the bulb of the hyacinth in its glass, at first a mere brown, clod-like thing, change, like a buried body at the Resurrection, to a being replete with life and beauty and perfume, does not feel that it is worth some self-denial? The creature who would not do without some luxury to buy a great book, to read a great poem, to see a fine picture, to hear the organ throb or the voice of the violin pulsate under the force of genius is nothing but a Philistine, half a barbarian, for his best faculties are paralyzed.

Æsthetics ought to be a part of our lives. It is a part of the every-day life of the Christian Church. The Church has drawn to *her* service the great masters of æsthetics in all ages. She made Raphael and Murillo possible. Botticelli and Fra Angelico could not have existed without her. She created the music of Palestrina, inspired Mozart and forced Haydn to join her choirs. Her ancient stained glass is the despair of modern artists. The carving in wood in her old cathedrals, the unapproachable models for carvers of the present day. Jewels, lace,

flowers, were drawn to her shrines. These sham æsthetes may praise paganism and make pæans in its honor, but true æstheticism is essentially Christian.

Education without æsthetics is like a sonnet without metre,—a peach without bloom,—a thrush without a voice,—a woman without gentle manners. *Æsthetics* does not consist of the painting of a bunch of golden rod or a sumach leaf on every available spot. The young woman who in search of new worlds to conquer painted a pansy on her father's bald head while he was asleep made a mistake. She probably found it out when he awoke. It consists in using and seeking to use the gifts God has bestowed on us in order to make our lives and the lives of our neighbors more pleasant and beautiful; it teaches us to value the little pleasures of life; it helps to put sweetness and light into dark and gloomy days. I use sweetness and light not because Matthew Arnold used them, but because, when used by a great theologian, centuries before Arnold was born, they expressed what I mean.

To be an æsthete in the common meaning of the word is to be a fool. It is to love art because it is fashionable; or rather to pretend to love it. Not long ago, every second house showed a spinning-wheel in its parlor decorated with orange, pink, or blue bows of ribbon. Why was the old-fashioned spinning-wheel given such prominence? Not because it is beautiful; not because it is old and the property of a mother or grandmother; for these spinning-wheels are made by the hundred in the furniture factories, but because it suddenly became fashionable to have

American ancestors. And the spinning-wheels and grandfather's clocks, bought by the dozen in old farm houses or made to order, were put for show in conspicuous and inappropriate places. Now this was false æsthetics. It was all sham. If I have an old cup, an old table, an old sideboard which belonged to my grandmother, it is right that I should value it, no matter how ugly it is. But if I buy an old thing, not because it is beautiful, but because it is fashionable to have it, I become part of a sham. To buy an old and beautiful thing is commendable; but if I buy it because it is fashionable, not caring whether it be beautiful or not, I fall below the level of good taste.

The rich man who comes from Europe bringing with him a miscellaneous collection of things which he has purchased for the reason that he has been told that they are fine, and for another reason—that they are dear,—is a pitiable object. In his pretense and ignorance he reminds one of the old Irish adage: "A well-dressed man without education is like a *boneen* with a jewel in his ear." A *boneen*, my friends, is a little pig; perhaps you know it in French as *cochon*. Riches cannot buy culture when the fine instinct does not exist; nor can they obtain true æsthetics through old clocks made last year in New Jersey, or somebody else's old spinning-wheels.

To be "æsthetic," in the true sense, one must be honest and sincere; not afraid to confess that one likes a simple and common thing, and not afraid to give one's reasons for such a liking. For myself, I have been in houses



which were palaces in which I was unhappy. And I have been in little houses which were anything but palaces and I have been very happy. The house which is like a museum, where a flamboyant copy of one of Rubens' Mary Magdalens jostles the Mercury of Praxiteles, where solferino-colored cushions bought at a "fancy" shop and Japanese screens, imitation armor and modern stained glass make confusion,—where a goblet carved by Cellini, a lion of Barye's and a tambourine painted with sunflowers repose side by side near the inevitable spinning-wheel, and where everything says: "All this cost money,"—that is a vulgar house.

There are probably more rich savages in America than anywhere else, for the reason that many of our rich people have not yet learned that one of the greatest privileges wealth gives them is that of exercising good taste to the utmost. A rich woman can afford to be elegant and simple. But too often she does not understand this. She glitters with diamonds in the morning and walks in the streets in gowns that, in Europe, no decent woman would wear unless she rode in a carriage. But this will be changed when we become more civilized; when we learn that the possession of riches does not make people worthy of respect and admiration, but that they must deserve it in other ways.

With your advantages of home training and the incomparable training you receive here, you will be in a position, when you enter the world, to distinguish between the true and the false æsthetics.

In order to make a good confession, one must have committed sin. In order to acquire good taste, one must know what bad taste is. It is bad taste to prefer costliness to elegance,—to imagine that costly things are always elegant. It is bad taste to admire things because they are fashionable without knowing why. As perhaps you discovered from my first lecture, I am not an authority on the subject of ladies' dress, but I do know that no young lady with a tip-tilted *retroussé*,—or, let us put it more gently,—a snub nose should wear a Grecian knot. Why? Because this fashion of wearing the hair was invented by the Greeks, a people who were more particular about the form and the fitness of things than even the French, who are the real modern Greeks in spirit. You will find in the famous head of the Clytie an example of this style of hair-dressing now so fashionable. You will observe, however, that she has not a nose "tip-tilted like a flower." The Grecian knot was invented to accompany the Grecian nose. And the young lady with a Roman or a *retroussé* nose who adopts the Grecian knot because it is the fashion errs against perfect taste. For the æsthetics of dress are worth considering if you consider dress at all. And even in small things it is best to be correct.

It is bad taste, when you are permitted to hear good singing, to admire and to think of the costumes of the *prima donna*, or at a fine play to consider the question whether the actress's dresses are by Worth, or not, as of as much importance as her delivery of the words. It seems to me to be bad taste not to choose religious



pictures and statues with some regard to the rules of art. It is a large part of the pretentious æsthetics of our time to dwell more on the effect than on the cause,—to think more of the attitude of the *Mater Dolorosa* of Carlo Dolce than of the ineffable woe her face expresses,—to rave about the opaline color of Fra Angelico's angels and to think nothing of the fervent religious spirit which created them. But some of us Catholics are prone to go to the other extreme. The gaudiest religious print is good enough for us. And while we revere unspeakably the Passion of Our Lord, we keep in our oratories crucifixes whose workmanship the most untutored Tyrolean peasant would not tolerate. I have seen pictures of Our Blessed Lady which were positively sacrilegious. While we would not endure for a moment in our parlors a picture of Washington with a magenta coat and a green hat, and a figure out of drawing, we contentedly put a figure of St. Joseph painted in the crudest and most vulgar manner in our oratories. And this in spite of the fact that we possess a thousand exquisite and poetical conceptions,—that all the power of the genius of the most artistic age of the world has burst forth in praise of Christ, His Mother and the Saints. While the “æsthetes” buy our old altar pieces for seemingly fabulous amounts of money, while their drawing-rooms and studies are filled with copies of Botticelli, Raphael, Guido and Overbeck, we are content with wretched prints and statues which make the judicious grieve. There is one woman in all this land who has, in spite of the vulgarity and ignorance around her, preached ardently the æsthetics of religion.

This is Miss Eliza Allen Starr. Her name deserves reverence.

There are many houses throughout this country where true æstheticism is understood; where serenity and peace dwell; where the spirit of beauty is cultivated; where the inmates have learned that costliness is not the measure of enjoyment. These are not generally the homes of the rich, nor the homes of the very poor. It is in the happy medium that one generally finds the truest refinement and culture. I call to mind one now. Its centre is the sitting-room of an old-fashioned house in the country. There are always good books on the centre-table. The mother and daughters know "The Following of Christ" by heart. The few pictures are copies of old painters,—good prints, and photographs. On the open piano, one sees, not the "Lullaby" from *Erminie* or a *Valse Brillante* by nobody knows who, but music showing that the brain and heart have been brought into practice as well as the fingers. And the people there are content. The lily and the tulip from their garden, the daisy and the violet from their meadows yield them renewed pleasure every year. They try to have only beautiful things around them, and they succeed, though they do not search the old curiosity shops for Louis Sixteenth cabinets or Henry Second vases, and I doubt whether they know the difference between the ware of Satsuma and the ware of Limoge.

It is true that the history of each kind of pottery is in part the history of the people who made it. From that point of view it is interesting. The Wedgewood ware

represents a crystallization of enduring and well-directed human effort, as you can see by reference to Samuel Smiles' "Self-Help" and how much wonderful and magnificent history is suggested by a carved cup of Benvenuto Cellini's. But when people begin to make the real purposes of life subservient to decoration,—to consider the fold of Oriental drapery, the marking of a teapot as of more importance than virtuous and cheerful living, it were better for them if all the pottery in the world had suffered the fate of the great Alexandrian Library and been burned in its own kilns.

This false æsthetics is a craze. I remember a dinner at which one of the apostles of this very changeable religion was present. He was an Englishman and an Oxford man. And the humble Americans waited anxiously for him, and the poor hostess went about with red flushes on her cheeks, fearing that everything would not be up to his lordship's expectations; for it was rumored that he once left a dinner-table because the lights were not changed with every course; and that he had no appetite unless the proper music was played while he dined. It was said that, by some mistake, the band had once indulged in a galop during the serving of the soup. This had given him a fit of dyspepsia from which he never recovered. The house was decorated with the choicest bits of ceramic. The talk was of the most "æsthetic" kind: "Oh," one lady said, "how intense,—how precious and utterly intense is the unwritten poetry of the unknown poet who never even murmurs the spontaneous, burning

thoughts that foam within him!" I was easily embarrassed then, so I said: "Yes, ma'am"—which was not the proper thing at all. When the great æsthete came, the ladies all gathered around him. "How intense!" they said, "how quite too utterly intense!" And one of them put a wreath of lilies on his head which hung down over his left eye. When the dinner had begun, he disappointed everybody by asking for roast beef and devouring three large slices. He shocked the hostess by saying, "when a man's hungry, he wants something more than ambrosia and nightingale's tongues, doesn't he?" But the attitudinizing, the straining after effect, the insincere nonsense talked by these people while they waited for the "æsthetic" splendor to dawn, showed how hollow and worthless their sham æsthetics was.

There can be no true beauty in life unless there is goodness as a foundation for it. True æsthetics must mean serenity and cheerfulness. It is really æsthetic to make the best of everything,—to look on the bright side,—to adorn the seamy side of life with such ornaments as are near you. The old Turkish writer's saying comes back again: "If I had only two loaves of bread, I would exchange one for a hyacinth."

The highest authority says that we cannot live by bread alone. And again: "Look at the lilies of the field." We cannot neglect the beauty of common things without losing much that is good in life. If we want to find the loveliest example of a household frugal, simple, contented, serene, let us glance back at that of Nazareth. There we

see the Virgin Mother—"blessed among women"—calmly, yet with joy singing in her heart, doing her household duties. The lily of the valley and the roses of Sharon bloom around her. She did not live amid Persian stuffs or the jewels of Solomon or ancient and curious vases, and yet she lived the highest and most beautiful of lives.

The æsthetics of literature does not mean what this new school would have us believe. We shall not find beauty and consolation in authors whose only merit is the refining of trifles or the deification of pagan vice. Swinburne and Rossetti, Villers and Rabelais, Gautier and Baudelaire can only be adored by men of perverted taste. As the drinker of whiskey cannot enjoy the flavor of food or liquid less fiery, so our æsthete, partially from perverted taste, partially from a desire to be perverted and singular, affect a liking for what no healthy-minded person can like.

The æsthetic sneer at "The Rainy Day" of Longfellow, at "The Lost Chord" of Adelaide Procter, at much of the poetry of Wordsworth, and at some of the poetry of Tennyson. They find that Sir Walter Scott is not "utter" enough; they can endure no music with a melody in it, no picture with a story in it. They pretend that a mutton chop eaten from an ordinary plate is hateful to them. And I have never believed that. But let us be content to know what the science and art of true æsthetics mean. Let us not be disturbed by these new English "fads." Let us like what we have good reason for liking. The fonder we are of our homes and our country, the more truly "æsthetic" we shall be. I can forgive the adora-

tion of the sunflower and the field daisy because they are American flowers. Let us practise the art of æsthetics by trying to find and to point out the beauty that springs from American soil and permeates American literature. Do not let us become vulgar by waiting with open mouths and beating hearts for the latest British utterances. Until we know the beauties of our own land, let us not go abroad. If we do, we deserve to be counted among that vulgar herd who "go to Europe to complete an education never begun at home."



## LECTURE IV.

### SOUTHWELL, CRASHAW, AND HABINGTON.

ALL poets have longed for clearer, more exact, and fervent expression of their inspiration than any earthly language can give, and all poets have felt that the highest poetry here falls short of that sublime poetry which their boldest thoughts only see as through a glass darkly. No poet seems to have known this longing and this limitation better than Robert Southwell. To him poetry brought no consolation, as we may judge from his poems. To him it brought no false quietism, which both Wordsworth and Cowper seem to take for consolation. He burned to manifest the divine love that lived within him; and, in the usual expression of poetry, he cried out. Southwell was a priest whom religion forced to be a poet; it is doubtful whether either Habington or Southwell would have been poets had they not been spurred on to ardent expression by the motive which religion gives to devout souls. This is true, perhaps, in a lesser degree of Habington and Crashaw than of Southwell. The former, however, would have been only *dilettanti*, had not religion given them clearness and strength. All three were, as another writer has expressed it of one of them, not merely poets who happened to be Catholics, they were poets and Catholics;



and their religion and inspiration were so near each other that it is difficult to tell which bade them sing.

No man can read the story of Robert Southwell's life without a feeling of reverential admiration. His life and his poetry are alike above our ordinary sympathy, for he was a martyr, and a poet whose theme was always of sacred things. Martyr and poet are epithets so grand that when a man deserves them he becomes superhuman. For this reason the poetry of Southwell will never become popular. His poems had some vogue in England, not because the public really preferred strength and real passion to the fashionable word-building and quaint conceits which passed for poetry, or felt his power as a poet, but because the heroism and pathos of his death attracted popular sympathy to his work. Even his enemies admitted that his death was worthy of an ancient Roman; and zeal, inflexible faith, and heroic endurance were not without honor even in days when the politicians had found it wise to lead the English nation to regard a Catholic priest as worse than a leper.

Southwell did not think much of poetry as an art; but this fault was not uncommon among the Elizabethan poets. His richness of expression is unbounded, unhusbanded. Nature, as nature, had no message for him. Nature was God's footstool; of the myriad voices, of the myriad phases in earth and heaven, he took no note for themselves. The rose and the lily were for him in their best place before the tabernacle, and the breath of the new-mown fields was less sweet to him than the incense

that wreathed the pillars of a church. Rhythm and rhyme were fetters to his thought rather than helps to it. Verse in his hands was the nearest earthly approach to that divine expression which the seraphs have; it was powerless to hold the fervor of a heart that burned with desire for union with our Lord. "St. Peter's Complaint"—the most worthy expression of his genius—is an evidence of this.

Southwell doubtless considered Shakspeare's contemporary poem of "Lucrece"—if, indeed, he read it—as Ulysses looked upon the sirens. Professor Hales, who contributes a brief but appreciative notice of Southwell to *The English Poets*, points out the striking resemblance, in a literary way, between "St. Peter's Complaint" and "Lucrece." In each poem there is an overpowering wealth of imagery, a crowding of illustration, a luxuriance of thought, and a minuteness of narration. "St. Peter's Complaint" is the stronger poem, not only in its motive but in treatment. "It is undoubtedly," says Prof. Hales, "the work of a mind of no ordinary copiousness, often embarrassed by its own riches, and so expending them with a prodigal carelessness." But it is something more than this. It is the outburst of a heart burning with divine love and poetic fire; it is unique in literature. It is not artistic; it contains little sweetness, no sympathy with the humanity of the saint, which a modern poet would have made the most prominent part of the "Complaint." The silence of a Stylites only could better express the penitence of such a soul as Southwell portrays. The poem is long, consisting of one hundred and forty six-line stanzas. These are striking and beautiful:

“ Like solest swan that swims in silent deep,  
 And never sings but obsequies of death,  
 Sing out thy plaints, and sole in secret weep,  
 In suing pardon spend thy perjured breath ;  
 Attire thy soul in sorrow's mourning weed,  
 And at thine eyes let guilty conscience bleed.

“ Still in the 'lembic of thy doleful breast  
 Those bitter fruits that from thy sins do grow ;  
 For fuel, self-accusing thoughts be best ;  
 Use fear as fire, the coals let penance blow ;  
 And seek none other quintessence but tears,  
 That eyes may shed what entered at thine ears.

. . . . .

“ When, traitor to the Son, in Mother's eyes,  
 I shall present my humble suit for grace,  
 What blush can paint the shame that shall arise  
 Or write my inward feelings on my face ?  
 Might she the sorrow with the sinner see,  
 Though I'm despised, my grief might pitied be.

“ But ah! how can her ears my speech endure,  
 Or scent my breath still reeking hellish steam ?  
 Can Mother like what did the Son abjure,  
 Or heart deflowered a virgin's love redeem ?  
 The Mother nothing loves the Son doth loathe ;  
 Ah! loathsome wretch, detested of them both.

. . . . .

“ Weep balm and myrrh, you sweet Arabian trees,  
 With purest gems perfume and pearl your rine ;  
 Shed on your honey-drops, your busy bees,  
 I, barren plant, must weep unpleasant brine :  
 Hornets, I hear, salt drops their labor plies,  
 Sucked out of sin, and shed by showering eyes.

“ If love, if loss, if fault, if spotted fame,  
 If danger, death, if wrath or wreck of weal,  
 Entitle eyes true heirs to earned blame,  
 That due remorse in such events conceal :  
 That want of tears might well enroll my name  
 As chiefest saint in calendar of shame.”

These quotations give only a slight idea of the beauty and richness of the poem. It is over-wrought, and the constant alliteration detracts somewhat from the simplicity of statement which would otherwise have strengthened many of the lines. One cannot help speculating upon the heights which Southwell might have reached in the art of poetry, had he not suffered death at the age of thirty-three—at the age when he desired most to die, if God willed it, as bringing him nearer that sublime Model of his life whom he loved so well to intimate. It is hardly possible that he would have written much, even had he lived to remain in England. The life of a priest in the days of “good queen Bess” had little leisure in it for dalliance with a muse that does not love turmoil. And, moreover, theology is not the most tender nurse of the poetic art. Theology is apt to restrict its steps and hold it in leading-strings, that it may not forget men’s souls in plucking flowers for the sake of their perfume. Dante, it is true, was a theologian, and Milton probably thought that he was one; but Southwell was a priest, and the holy office cannot accept a divided heart. It is quite probable that in “St. Peter’s Complaint” he reached his highest watermark in poetry. It may have been in him, as it was in the author of “Lucrece,” to write a poem that would move the hearts of all the ages to come; but to him, as a priest and poet, fame was nothing. The soul nearest him was more important to him than the admiration of centuries. Southwell is one of a very few poets who never felt the touch of earthly passion or of that sentiment, half-human,

half-divine, that we call love. Even Crashaw's address to his mythical mistress, impersonal as it is, expresses a feeling which Southwell never experienced. He lent no ear to the Circe who transformed so many of his brother poets into a semblance of bestiality. As a priest, he felt the sacredness of his place above angels; and there is no sign of that conflict between the sensuous and the spiritual to which poetic temperaments seem especially prone. In this Southwell offers a striking contrast to a rare and delicate modern genius, Maurice de Guérin, who, likewise a Catholic and with a strong instinct toward the entire consecration of himself to God, shattered himself in a struggle between the sensuousness of nature and the asceticism which he felt in Christianity. But Southwell was the highest type of a Catholic. This fact, from the ordinary literary point of view, doubtless restricted his scope as a poet; but from the ordinary literary point of view, the manner is above the thing, the art of Gautier above the fervor of Southwell, and human love is only worthy of the poet's song. Southwell is none the less a poet that he sang to God alone. The texture of his work is stained in the Blood of the Sacred Heart, not iridescent with the changing hues that arise from corruption. "Love's Plot," which is not inappropriate here, is full of a characteristic sententiousness that shows his firm poetical grasp by never becoming prosy or commonplace:

" Love mistress is of many minds,  
 Yet few know whom they serve :  
 They reckon least how little love  
 Their service doth deserve.

“The will she robbeth from the wit,  
The sense from reason’s lore ;  
She is delightful in the rind,  
Corrupted in the core.

“She shroudeth vice in virtue’s veil  
Pretending good in ill ;  
She offereth joy, affordeth grief,  
A kiss when she doth kill.

“A honey flower reigns from her lips,  
Sweet lights shine in her face ;  
She hath the blush of virgin’s mind,  
The mind of viper’s race.

“She makes thee seek, yet fear to find ;  
To find, but not enjoy ;  
In many frowns some gliding smiles  
She yields, to more annoy.

“Like winter rose and summer ice,  
Her joys are still untimely ;  
Before her hope, behind remorse,  
Fair first, in fine unseemly.

“Moods, passions, fancies, jealous fits,  
Attend upon her train ;  
She yieldeth rest without repose,  
A heaven in hellish pain.

“Her house is sloth, her door deceit,  
And slippery hopes her stairs ;  
Unbashful boldness bids her guests,  
And every vice appears.

“Her sleep in sin doth end in wrath,  
Remorse rings her awake ;  
Death calls her up, shame drives her out,  
Despairs her upshot make.

“Plough not the seas, sow not the sands,  
Leave off your idle pain ;  
Seek other mistress for your minds—  
Love’s service is in vain.”



“Times go by Turns” and “The Burning Babe” are already too well known to Catholics to need reproduction. It is strange that his “Child of my Choice”—a tender and fervent address to the Child Jesus—has not found its way into our hymn books.

Southwell was not the only poet who suffered on the scaffold. The gallant Surrey had preceded him, and in after-years André Chénier died by the hand of the executioner; but no poet in modern times died the glorious death of Southwell. The deaths of Surrey and Chénier were as mournful sunsets; his a glorious sunrise. Like his own “solest swan,” his last songs in prison were sweetest, for he had already pierced, with a martyr’s vision, the splendors of heaven.

From his childhood he was fervently religious. He was the third son of Richard Southwell, a Catholic gentleman of Norfolk. Robert was born at his father’s seat, Hors-ham, St. Faith’s, about the year 1562. There is a tradition to the effect that a gypsy woman made an attempt to steal him, in the hope of gain; and he never ceased, it is said, to show his gratitude to God for having saved him from a semi-savage and vagrant life. Although the Southwell family was Catholic, Richard Southwell never permitted his religion to stand in the way of his preferment; and in those days Catholics could obtain worldly advantage only by the sacrifice of principle. Robert’s tendency towards the religious life was so strong that he was sent to Douay to be educated for the priesthood, and from there to Paris. This fact speaks well for his father, who



risked much by having him educated abroad. Robert went from Paris to Rome, where he was received into the Society of Jesus. Early in the year 1585 he applied for permission to return to England. The thought of souls perishing for the sacred nourishment that he could give them filled him with a solicitude that was agony, and he longed for the crown of martyrdom. The peril that faced him was not vague. "Any papist," according to the statute 27 Elizabeth c. 2, "born in the dominions of the crown of England, who should come over thither from beyond the sea (unless driven by stress of weather, and tarrying only a reasonable time), or should be in England three days without conforming and taking the oath, should be guilty of high treason." Southwell knew that a Jesuit was doubly obnoxious to the herd of Englishmen who blindly followed time-serving leaders; he knew, too, that if discovered he would be hanged, drawn, and quartered. He did not shrink. Perhaps he reverently repeated the words of his "Burning Babe:"

" Love is the fire and sighs the smoke, the ashes shame and scorn,  
 The fuel Justice layeth on, and Mercy blows the coals;  
 The metal in this furnace wrought are men's defiled souls;  
 For which, as now on fire I am, to work them to their good,  
 So will I melt into a bath, to wash them in my blood."

Southwell's letter to his father, which he wrote soon after his return to England, shows that the poet who wrote "St. Peter's Complaint" might as easily have spoken an apologia before the despots who in England imitated the persecutions of Diocletian in the name of "reformation."

The letter is full of that earnestness and faith which were ingrained in this remarkable man :

“ Who hath more interest in the grape than he who planted the vine ? Who more right to the crop than he who sowed the corn ? or where can the child owe so great service as to him to whom he is indebted for his very life and being ? With young Tobias, I have travelled far, and brought home a freight of spiritual substance to enrich you, and medicinal receipts against your ghostly maladies. I have, with Esau, after a long toil in pursuing a long and painful chase, returned with the full prey you were wont to love, desiring thereby to insure your blessing. I have, in this general famine of all true and Christian food, with Joseph, prepared abundance of the bread of angels for the repast of your soul. And now my desire is that my drugs may cure you, my prey delight you, and my provision feed you, by whom I have been cured, enlightened, and fed myself ; that your courtesies may, in part, be countervailed, and my duty, in some sort, performed. Despise not, good sire, the youth of your son, neither deem your God measureth his endowments by number of years. Hoary senses are often couched under youthful locks, and some are riper in the spring than others in the autumn of their age. God chose not Esau himself, nor his eldest son, but young David to conquer Goliath and to rule his people : not the most aged person, but Daniel the most innocent youth, delivered Susannah from the iniquity of the judges. Christ at twelve years of age was found in the temple, questioning with the greatest doctors. A true Elias can conceive that a little cloud may cast a large and abundant shower ; and the Scripture teaches us that God unveileth to little ones that which He concealeth from the wisest sages. His truth is not abashed by the minority of the speaker, for out of the mouths of infants and sucklings He can perfect His praises. Timothy was young, and yet a principal pastor ; St. John a youth, and yet an apostle ; yea, the angels by appearing in youthful semblance, gave us a proof that many glorious gifts may be shrouded under tender shapes. All this I say, not to claim any privileges surmounting the rate of usual abilities, but to avoid all touch of presumption in advising my elders ; seeing that it hath the warrant of Scripture, the testimony of example, and sufficient ground both in grace and nature.

“ If you,” says this earnest poet, “ if you were stretched on your departing bed, burdened with the heavy load of your former tres-

passes, and gored with the sting of a festered conscience ; if you felt the hand of death grasping your heart-strings, and ready to make the rueful divorce between-body and soul ; if you lay panting for breath and bathed in a cold and fatal sweat, wearied with struggling against the pangs of death, oh ! how much you would give for one hour for repentance ! at what rate you would value one day's contrition ! Worlds would then be worthless in respect of a little respite ; a short time would seem more precious than the treasures of empires. Nothing would be so much esteemed as a moment of time, which is now by months and years so lavishly misspent. Oh ! how deeply would it wound your heart when, looking back into yourself, you consider many faults committed and not confessed : many good works omitted or not recovered ; your service to God promised but never performed. How intolerable will be your case ! Your friends are fled, your servants frightened, your thoughts amazed, your memory distracted, your whole mind aghast, and, unable to perform what it would, only your guilty conscience will continually upbraid you with most bitter accusations. What will be your thoughts when, stripped of your mortal body, and turned both out of the service and house-room of this world, you are forced to enter into uncouth and strange paths, and with unknown and ugly company to be carried before a most severe Judge, carrying in your own conscience your judgment written, and a perfect register of all your misdeeds ; when you shall see *Him* prepared to pass sentence upon you against whom you have transgressed ; He is to be the umpire whom by so many offences you have made your enemy ; when not only the devils but even the angels will plead against you, and yourself, in spite of your will, be your own sharpest impeacher ? What would you do in these dreadful exigencies, when you saw the ghastly dungeon and huge gulf of hell breaking out with most fearful flames ; when you heard the weeping and gnashing of teeth, the rage of these hellish monsters, the horror of the place, the rigor of the pain, the terror of the company, and the eternity of the punishment ? Would you then think them wise that would delay in such weighty matters, and idly play away a time allotted to prevent such intolerable calamities ? Would you then account it secure to nurse in your bosom a brood of serpents, or suffer your soul to entertain so many accusers ? Would not you then think a whole life too little to do penance for so many iniquities ? Why, then, do you not at least devote the small remnant and surplus of these your latter days in seeking to make an atonement with God, and in freeing your conscience

from the corruption that, by your treason and fall, has crept into it; whose very eyes that read this discourse, and very understanding that conceiveth it, shall be cited as certain witnesses of what I describe? Your soul will then experience the most terrible fears, if you do not recover yourself into the fold and family of God's Church."

For six years Southwell labored in his native land. Many Catholic souls, even priests, in hiding, were strengthened by his example and consoled by his fervent piety. His zeal made many return to the Church and saved others from apostasy. Protected by Lady Arundel, whose confessor he was, he performed his sacred duties and wrote at intervals; but the crown of martyrdom, like a pillar of fire, was always before him. It led to the Promised Land, and he was soon to gain the end for which he worked. The manner of his betrayal and imprisonment is related graphically by Mr. Turnbull in his biography affixed to Mr. Russell Smith's edition of the martyr's poems:

"There was resident at Uxendon, near Harrow-on-the-Hill, in Middlesex, a Catholic family of the name of Bellamy, whom Southwell was in the habit of visiting and providing with religious instruction, when he exchanged his ordinary close confinement for a purer atmosphere. One of the daughters, Ann, had in her early youth exhibited marks of the most vivid, unmistakable piety; but, having been committed to the Gatehouse of Westminster, her faith gradually departed, and along with it her virtue. For, having formed an intrigue with the keeper of the prison, she subsequently married him, and by that step forfeited all claim which she had by law or favor upon her father. In order, therefore, to obtain some fortune she resolved to take advantage of the act of 27 Elizabeth, which made the harboring of a priest a treason, with confiscation of the offender's goods. Accordingly she sent a messenger to Southwell, urging him to meet her on a certain day and hour at her father's house, whither he, either in ignorance of what had happened, or under the impression that she

sought his spiritual assistance through motives of penitence, went at the appointed time. In the mean while, having apprised her husband of this, as also of the place of concealment in her father's house and the mode of access, he conveyed the information to Topcliff, an implacable persecutor and denouncer of the Catholics, who with a band of his satellites, surrounded the premises, broke open the house, arrested his reverence, and carried him off in open day, exposed to the gaze of the populace. He was taken in the first instance to Topcliff's house, where during a few weeks he was put to the torture ten times, with such dreadful severity that Southwell, complaining of it to his judges, declared in the name of God that death would have been more preferable.

"The manner in which he was agonized may be seen in Tanner's *Societas Jesu Martyr*. But all was to no purpose ; the sufferer maintained an inflexible silence ; nothing could shake his constancy ; and the tormentors affirmed that he resembled a post rather than a man. He was then transferred to the same Gatehouse which was kept by the husband of the wretch who had betrayed him, and, after being confined there for two months, was removed to the Tower and thrown into a dungeon so filthy and noisome that, when brought forth at the end of a month to be examined, his clothes were covered with vermin. Whereupon his father presented a petition to Elizabeth, humbly entreating that if his son had committed anything for which by the laws he had deserved it, he might suffer death ; if not, as he was a gentleman, he hoped her majesty would be pleased to order that he should be treated as such, and not to be confined in that filthy hole. The queen, in consequence, ordered that he should be better lodged and gave his father permission to supply him with clothing, necessaries, and books ; of which latter the only ones which he asked for were the Bible and the works of St. Bernard. During all his protracted confinement, although his sister Mary, who was married to a gentleman of the name of Bannister, had occasional access to him, he never discoursed of anything but religion."

He was kept in prison for three years. At last, upon his own petition, he was brought to trial. According to Challoner, Cecil's reply to this petition was "that if he was in so much haste to be hanged he should quickly have his desire." He was removed from the Tower to New-



gate, and on the 21st of February, 1595, he was taken to Westminster and tried. His conduct before the court was worthy of his life. He was serene, manly, and not presumptuous. He denied that he was guilty of treason, but confessed that he was a Catholic priest, and that his purpose in England was to administer the rites of the Church to her faithful children. He was condemned, and on the morning of the 22d of February was executed at Tyburn. Through the blundering of the hangman his agony was prolonged, and he "several times made the sign of the cross while hanging." He was drawn and quartered; but "through the kindness and interference of the bystanders the martyr was allowed to die before the indignities and mutilations were allowed." And this happened in the reign of a woman whom historians have named "good," and whom Englishmen have been taught to reverence as "great!"



William Habington, who was born in 1605, has been strangely neglected by Catholics and the public in general. The pathos of Southwell's death did much toward keeping his fame alive; but it is difficult to understand why, when Crashaw is remembered, Habington is almost forgotten. In those wonderful *mélanges* of literature compounded "for the use of schools and colleges" it is difficult to find mention of him, and well did he write in "The Holy Man: "

"Grown older I admired  
Our poets as from heaven inspired



What obelisks decreed I fit  
For Spenser's art and Sydney's wit !  
But waxing sober soon I found  
Fame but an idle sound."

It is not surprising that we, who have left the name of a real Catholic poet, George Miles, fade away, and to whom the Catholic Canadian, Louis Fréchette, is only an unknown name, should not delve into volumes of forgotten law for Habington's poems; it is surprising that at this time, when the resurrection of musty poets has become a mania, so little has been done for one who, if not born a singer, was yet so near the divine voice as to catch some exquisite echoes. He was pre-eminently the poet of conjugal love, as Southwell was the poet of the higher love. His song is always of two pure hearts feeling hope and fear, to whom the fever of passion is unknown. Habington came of a good Catholic family, which is a distinction in a country where the good families had been so willing to barter faith for fortune. The staunchness of his blood was proved by the way his ancestors had kept the faith. His uncle, Edward Habington, having been implicated in Babington's famous conspiracy to rescue the Queen of Scots, was hanged, drawn and quartered at St. Giles in the Fields. As usual, there was a Protestant minister at the scaffold, who urged him to be of a lively faith. He answered that he believed steadfastly in the Catholic faith. The minister feared that he deceived himself, and asked what he meant. "I mean," he answered, "that faith and religion which is holden in almost all Christendom, except here in England." After this, much to the disgust of the reverend

gentleman, he would answer no questions, but prayed to himself in Latin. In his dying speech he "cast out threats and terrors of the blood that was ere long to be shed in England." The poet's father, Thomas Habington, was also implicated in the same conspiracy. He escaped probably because the people were becoming tired of the shedding of the blood of some of the noblest men in England. It was not hard for the public to sympathize with generous youths who, as if to return to the days of chivalry, had risked their lives in behalf of a beautiful and unfortunate queen. The people at heart were not entirely devoted to the daughter of Anne Boleyn, and the wily politicians around her throne knew when it was prudent to stop the shedding of blood. Hence, Thomas Habington escaped the fate of his brother. He went to prison, however, and when he was released, Mary Stuart had bidden farewell to earth and gone, let us hope, to find a happier than even "*le plaisant pays de France*." He retired to his ancestral manor, Hendlip, where he led a life of lettered leisure, producing several works of local topography and a translation of the epistle of Geldus à Britain. He suffered a second imprisonment for suspected implication in the Gunpowder Plot. That he sheltered the Jesuits, Father Garnet and Father Oldcorne, afterwards most unjustly hanged, at Hendlip, was the only evidence against him. James I. is said always to have been partial to the partisans of his mother, and it is possible that Thomas Habington's connection with the Babington plot may have worked in favor of his release. His brother-in-law, Lord Monteagle,

interceded in his behalf, and after his escape a second time he betook himself to the company of his children and books.

Of his son, the poet, little is known, except his love-story. He was educated at St. Omer and at Paris. Returning to England with the down just sprouting on his lip, he fell in love. The lady of his thoughts was Lucy Herbert, the daughter of Lord Powis. Habington was a gentleman of small estate and a bearer of a name that of late had not been on the winning side. Lord Powis felt that the niece of Northumberland and the granddaughter of an earl might look for a more splendid suitor. But Lucy—the incomparable *Castara* of Habington's poem—looked with favor on the poet. The course of true love did not run smooth, but its variations were rather the ripples of an April shower than the waves of an autumn storm. Following the fashion, young Habington wooed his lady-love in verse. It does not take much to excite turmoil in a poet's soul, and Habington's troubles must have been mild indeed, since they did not excite anything but the most proper and gentlemanlike protest:

" Parents' laws must bear no weight  
 When they happiness prevent,  
 And our sea is not so strait  
 But it room has for content."

This is about the most violent sentiment he utters. Lord Powis belonged to the Catholic branch of the Herberts, and the stanchness of the Habington faith must have had some effect in softening his opposition. He was not a

very cruel parent, and the fact that Habington had a small estate neutralized his demerit, in a father's eyes, of occasionally dropping into poetry. In all his raptures of Castara's sighs, glances, eyebrows, and bosom Habington never loses a certain consciousness of "deportment." He is never tired of protesting that the bent of his love is honorable and his purpose marriage—an iteration that the occasion does seem to require. But if his verse was somewhat mannered—and even the spiritual Southwell did not escape the conceits of his time—his sentiment is always honest, manly, and pure. His thoughts did not wander from his wife, the wonderful Castara. Next to religion she was the lodestar of his thoughts. He was married at the age of twenty-eight, and the years of his life afterward kept the peaceful and happy promise of his wedding-day.

His description of Castara is the most exquisite passage in his greatest poem:

" Like the violet which alone  
 Prospers in some happy shade,  
 My Castara lives unknown,  
 To no looser eye betrayed.  
 For she's to herself untrue  
 Who delights i' th' public view.

" Such is her beauty, as no arts  
 Have enricht with borrowed grace,  
 Her high birth no pride imparts,  
 For she blushes in her place.  
 Folly boasts a glorious blood;  
 She is noblest being good.

“ Cautious, she knew never yet  
 What a wanton courtship meant ;  
 Nor speaks loud to boast her wit,  
 In her silence eloquent.  
 Of herself survey she takes,  
 But 'tween men no difference makes.

“ She obeys with speedy will  
 Her grave parent's wise commands ;  
 And so innocent that ill  
 She nor acts nor understands.  
 Women's feet run still astray,  
 If once to ill they know the way.

“ She sails by that rock, the court,  
 Where oft honour splits her mast ;  
 And retiredness thinks the port  
 Where her fame may anchor cast.  
 Virtue safely cannot sit,  
 Where vice is enthron'd for wit.

“ She holds that day's pleasure best  
 When sin waits not on delight.  
 Without mask, or ball, or feast,  
 Sweetly spends a winter's night.  
 O'er that darkness, whence is thrust  
 Prayer and sleep, oft governs lust.

“ She her throne makes reason climb,  
 While wild passions captive lie,  
 And each, each article of time  
 Her pure thoughts to heaven fly.  
*All her vows religious be,  
 And her love she vows to me.”*

He was friendly with all the great literary men of the time. There is a tradition that he was not absent from those feasts of reason and flows of sack in which Jonson, Massinger, and the jolly crew of the famous old inns indulged; with him all things were enjoyed in moderation.

Tranquil, serene, surrounded by his children and supported by a firm faith, of which "The Holy Man," the fourth part of "Castara," is an evidence, he ended a happy and peaceful life in 1654.

He had not been unaccustomed to the pomp of that court in which Charles I. and Henrietta Maria reigned, in which Waller sang and Vandyke painted, and in his volume of poems (republished by Arber in 1870) the most celebrated names of the epoch appear in dedications. His tragi-comedy of "The Queene of Arragon" was acted in 1640 at Whitehall. The favor of the court did not disturb him, nor did the Civil War draw him from his seclusion. He was not a man to act except under strong impulse, and it is probable that neither the Cavaliers nor the Roundheads wholly had his sympathy.

"Castara" is divided into four parts. "The Mistress," "The Wife," "The Friend," and "The Holy Man." It speaks well for the unpoetical constancy of Habington that Castara as the wife is even more beloved than Castara the mistress. The muse did not say imperatively to him, as she did to a later and very different bard,\* "Poëte, prends ton luth." Indeed, one cannot help suspecting that he often took up his lute because he had nothing else to do. From lack of perception Habington is often uneven. That perfect art that welds all parts into simplicity was unknown to him as to most of the Elizabethan poets. He startles the reader with vivid lines which are like the bright scarlet of the salt-marsh's bushes among the tawny

---

\* De Musset, "Nuit de Mai."



hues of autumn. He cares little for the technical part of his art. His sonnet to "Castara in a Trance," although very fine, lacks the dignity of the sonnets of Milton, which he must have known. To those scornful critics who assert that the sonnet at its best is only fourteen jingling lines, it will be an interesting comparison with any one of Dante's or with Wordsworth's "The World is Too Much with Us."

"Forsake me not too soon ; Castara, stay,  
And as I break the prison of my clay  
I'll fill the canvas with my expiring breath,  
And sail with thee o'er the vast main of Death.  
Some cherubim thus, as we pass, shall play :  
"Go, happy twins of love !" The courteous sea  
Shall smooth her wrinkled brow ; the winds shall sleep,  
Or only whisper music to the deep ;  
Every ungentle rock shall melt away,  
The sirens sing to please, not to betray ;  
The indulgent sky shall smile ; each starry choir  
Contend which shall afford the brighter fire ;  
While love, the pilot, steers his course so even,  
Ne'er to cast anchor till we reach to heaven."

This is a jingling sonnet; but it is not the sonnet's highest form. These striking lines, like most striking lines in his poetry, are too epigrammatic; nevertheless they are beautiful. He addressed roses in Castara's bosom:

"Then that which living gave you room  
Your glorious sepulchre shall be ;  
There wants no marble for a tomb  
Whose breast has marble been to me."

In this stanza there is much melody and truth:

"They hear but when the mermaid sings,  
And only see the falling star,  
Who ever dare  
Affirm no woman chaste or fair."

His reverence for the Blessed Virgin, and, after her, for Castara, made him believe in the virtue of all women. Sensuousness, which is not lacking in his poems, never degenerated into sensuality. The boldest flight of his fancy is stayed by the influence of religion on a clean heart. He believed that

“Virtuous love is one sweet, endless fire.”

To poets who thought otherwise, he said:

“You who are earth and cannot rise  
 Above your sense,  
 Boasting the envied wealth which lies  
 Bright in your mistress’ lips or eyes,  
 Betray a pitied eloquence.”

The exquisite lines,

“When I survey the bright celestial sphere,  
 So rich with jewels hung that night  
 Doth like an Ethiop bride appear,”

remind one of Shakspeare’s

“Her beauty hung upon the cheek of night,  
 Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear.”

There is no greater similarity between these passages than between Wordsworth’s

“Violet by a mossy stone,”

and Habington’s

“Like a violet which alone  
 Prospers in some happy shade.”

But why blame poets for limning coincidences which nature makes? The poet who is truest to nature must often seem to plagiarize from those who have been true

before him. Habington's worst faults are those of taste. They go no deeper. "Castara," as a whole, is a noble poem that deserves to live. Probably in no other poet's works—if we except Tennyson—has a higher, yet not superhuman, idea of womanhood been given. The most exceptional and beautiful characteristic of the three truly Catholics poets—Southwell, Habington, and Crashaw—is their spotless purity of word and thought. Faith and purity go hand-in-hand. If "Castara" were studied in this age it might almost make chastity fashionable among men. This virtue of Sir Galahad was not common in Habington's time, and it has always required much courage in a man of the world to proclaim that he possesses a quality which is generally regarded as the crowning attribute of womanhood. To this poet, who dared to dedicate, in a licentious age, his work to the woman who was to him as the Church of Christ, we owe honor; it was his Catholic faith and practice that made him so noble among the men of his time. Habington ought to be studied by all young Catholics. Americans have inherited his poems along with that language which was forced on the ancestors of some of us, but which is none the less our own. His faults of *technique*, so glaringly apparent in this day of almost perfect *technique* in poetry, offer lessons in themselves. No man can read "Castara" without feeling better and purer, and of how many poets can this be said? Since Pope taught the critics to place execution above conception, Habington has found no place. It remains for the rising generation of young Catholics who read and

think to give him a niche that will not be unworthy of the poet of that chaste love which was born of Christianity.

\* \* \*

If Richard Crashaw, a poet who, by reason of his entire devotion to his faith and his absolute purity, belongs to this group, had written nothing except the finale of "The Flaming Heart," he would deserve more fame than at present distinguishes his name. "The Flaming Heart," marred as it is by those exasperating conceits which Crashaw never seemed tired of indulging in, is full of the intense fervor which the subject—"the picture of the seraphical St. Teresa, as she is usually expressed with seraphim beside her"—would naturally suggest to a religious and poetic mind. After what Mr. Simcox very justly calls "an atrocious and prolonged conceit," \* this poem beautifully closes:

"O thou undaunted daughter of desires !  
 By all thy dower of lights and fires ;  
 By all the eagle in thee, all the dove ;  
 By all thy lives and deaths of love ;  
 By thy large draughts of intellectual day,  
 And by thy thirsts of love more large than they ;  
 By all thy brim-fill'd bowls of fierce desire,  
 By thy last morning's draught of liquid fire,  
 By the full kingdom of that final kiss  
 That seized thy parting soul and sealed thee His ;  
 By all the heav'n thou hast in him,  
 (Fair sister of the seraphim !)  
 By all of him we have in thee,  
 Leave nothing of myself in me.  
 Let me so read thy life that I  
 Unto all life of mine may die."

The mystical fire which lights this poem is a characteristic of all Crashaw's religious verses. "Intellectual day" is a favorite expression of his; "the brim-fill'd bowls of fierce desire" is one of those lowering conceits that occur so jarringly in Habington's poetry, and that are intolerably frequent in Crashaw. Born about 1615, he began to write at a time when a poem lacking in quaint conceits was scarcely a poem, and his verse, delicate, tender, original, and singularly fluent in diction, lost much strength from this circumstance and from his habit of diluting a thought or a line until all its force was lost. No poet since his time has been given so greatly to dilution and repetition, except Swinburne. In the famous "Wishes," written to a mythical mistress,

"Whoe'er she be,  
That not impossible she  
That shall command my heart and me,"

he plays with one idea, fantastically twisting it and repeating it until the reader grows weary.

In 1646, four years before his death, Richard Crashaw published "Steps to the Temple." Reading it, one may well exclaim, with Cowley:

"Poet and saint, to thee alone are given  
The two most sacred names in earth and heaven!"

It glows with an impetuous devotion which is like the rush of a fiery chariot. It carries the soul upward, although an occasional earthly conceit clogs its ascending rush. And yet it is evident that the devotion of the poet

was so genuine that he did not think of his mode of expression. He tore out the words that came nearest to him, in order to build a visible thought. Pope did not hesitate to borrow the finest passages in "Eloisa and Abelard" from Crashaw, and there are many lines in Crashaw's poems which unite the perfect finish of Pope to a spontaneity and poetic warmth which the "great classic" never attained.

Crashaw was born in an "intellectual day" tempered by a dim religious light. His father, like Habington's, was an author, a preacher in the Temple Church, London, near which the poet was born. He took his degree at Cambridge. He entered the Anglican Church as a minister. But his views were not orthodox; he was expelled from his living, and soon after he became a Catholic. From his poems it is plain that Crashaw was always a Catholic at heart. He entered the Church as one who, having lived in a half-forgotten place in dreams, enters it without surprise. Crashaw went to court, but gained no preferment. The "not impossible she" whose courtly opposites suggested the portrait never "materialized" herself. He became a priest, and died in 1650, canon of Loretto—an office which he obtained, it is said, through the influence of the exiled Queen Henrietta Maria. Crashaw's poems are better known than Habington's, though, with the exception of "Wishes," which, like Herrick's "To Daffodils," is quoted in almost every reader, and the lovely poem beginning,



“Lo! here a little volume but large book  
(Fear it not, sweet,  
It is no hypocrite),  
Much larger in itself than in its look,”

they are read only in odd lines or striking couplets. Crashaw had the softened fire of Southwell with the placid sweetness of Habington. He possessed a wider range than either of them; the fact that he was at his best in paraphrases shows that he did not own the force and power which Habington had in less degree than Southwell, or that his fluency of diction and copiousness of imagery easily led him to ornament the work of others rather than to carve out his own. As he stands, any country—even that which boasts of a Shakspeare—may be proud to claim him. For the fame of our three Catholic poets it is unfortunate that they wrote in the great shade of Shakspeare; but in the presence of great intellectual giants they are by no means dwarfs. Flawless as men, unique and genuine as poets, they cannot die as long as the world honors goodness and that divine spark which men call poetry. They were Catholic; true alike to their faith and their inspiration; faithful, and, being faithful, pure as poets or men are seldom pure.

## LECTURE V.

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF TENNYSON.

I AM about to speak of the greatest artist in words who has ever worked in the plastic English language—an artist who, having the divine gift of uttering poetry both in essentials and attributes, yet, with constant and noble dissatisfaction, refines these attributes to their highest point. I mean Lord Tennyson, a great English poet, but not the greatest of English poets.

His influence on the life and literature of our time has been immense. He at once expressed and reflected the spirit of our time, although of late there has been a perceptible move against his teachings or rather his ideals. A literary generation that pretends to like brutal realism cannot logically be expected to admire the purity and delicacy of a poet who never fails to throw all the light of a glorious art around truth, purity, and duty.

King Arthur is too ideal, too pure, for tastes formed by Swinburne and Rossetti, and the readers of novels which depend for their success on constant sensation find Tennyson's exquisite pictures of inanimate objects without interest. And yet if Tennyson succeeded Wordsworth,

Tennyson also succeeded Byron. While Wordsworth was serene, a painter of nature, Byron was the opposite of him. He was fiery, volcanic, furious, lurid, great in genius, but, it must be said, impure. But he was popular, while Wordsworth, whom the world is now only beginning to acknowledge, was neglected; so that, strange as it may seem at first, Tennyson's immediate predecessor was Lord Byron. Byron's popularity was great while he lived; young men quoted him, wore open and turn-down collars, assumed a corsair-like look and an appearance of wickedness which were supposed to be Byronic. This generation passed away, or rather grew older, and the younger people became Tennysonian. They were sentimental and a little maudlin; but they did not affect Byronic desperation or mysterious wickedness. The hero of "Locksley Hall,"—I mean the first part of it, for I think the second part printed about ten years ago is decidedly the better,—is a poor kind of a stick. And the hero of "Maud" is of a similar type.

In "Locksley Hall" the hero sighs and moans, and calls Heaven's vengeance down on his ancestral roof because a young girl has refused to marry him,—because his cousin Amy marries another man, he goes into a paroxysm of poetry and denunciation and prophecy. But as Shakespeare says,—“Many men have died, but not for love.” And the hero of "Locksley Hall" lives to write in a calmer style a good many years later. "Maud," another famous poem, like "Locksley Hall," showed something of the influence of Byron. It is a love story, too, broken, inco-

herent, but very poetical, with lines, here and there, that seem to flash into the mind; for instance:

“ A million emeralds break from the ruby-budded lime  
In the little grove where I sit,—ah, wherefore cannot I be  
Like things of the season gay, like the bountiful season bland,  
When the far-off sail is blown by the breeze of a softer clime,  
Half lost in the liquid azure bloom of a crescent of sea,  
The silent, sapphire-spangled marriage-ring of the land.”

After “Locksley Hall” and “Maud,” the influence of Byron on Tennyson seems to grow less.

In studying the poetry of poets, it is a wise thing to study the influence of poets upon it. The young Tennyson's favorite poet was Thomson,—he of the serene and gentle “Seasons.” Alfred Tennyson was born at Somersby in Lincolnshire, England, on August 6th, 1809. He began to write stories when he was very young. He wrote chapters of unending novels which he put, day after day, under the potato bowl on the table. Miss Thackeray says that one of these, which lasted for months, was called “The Old Horse.” She gives this account of his first poem:

“Alfred's first verses, so I have heard him say, were written upon a slate which his brother Charles put into his hand one Sunday at Louth, when all the elders of the party were going into church, and the child was left alone. Charles gave him a subject—the flowers in the garden—and when he came back from church little Alfred brought the slate to his brother, all covered with written lines of blank verse. They were made on the models of Thomson's ‘Seasons,’ the only poetry he had ever read. One

can picture it all to one's self, the flowers in the garden, the verses, the little poet with waiting eyes, and the young brother scanning the lines. 'Yes, you can write,' said Charles, and he gave Alfred back the slate."

There is another story that his grandfather asked him to write an elegy on his grandmother. When it was written, the old gentleman gave the boy ten shillings, saying: "There, that is the first you have ever earned by your poetry, and, take my word for it, it will be your last."

This Charles, who admitted that Alfred could write, became a very sweet poet himself as years went on. The poet of Alfred's first love was the calm and pleasant Thomson. Later, as he grew toward manhood, he read Byron, then the fashion. He scribbled in the Byronic strain. How strong a hold Byron's fiery verse had taken on the boy's mind is shown by his own confession. When Alfred was about fifteen, the news came that Byron was dead. "I thought the whole world was at an end," he said. "I thought everything was over and finished for every one—that nothing else mattered. I remember I walked out alone, and carved 'Byron is dead' into the sandstone." Although "Locksley Hall" and "Maud" show Byronic reflections, yet they were not the earliest published of Tennyson's poems.

His life was placid, serene, pleasant. At home in one of the sweetest spots of England, at college he lived among congenial friends, and his after-life was and is the ideal life of a poet. The premature death of his friend, Arthur Hallam—to which we owe the magnificent poem, "In

Memoriam"—was perhaps the saddest event that came to him. Longfellow, his great contemporary, was also happy. And just before the tragic death of his wife—she was burned to death—a friend passing his cottage said: "I fear change for Longfellow, for any change must be for the worse."

And this is the drop of bitterness that must tinge all our happiness in this world—the thought that most changes must be for the worse. But changes that have come to Tennyson have brought him more praise, more honor, until of late people have begun to say that the laureate could only mar the monument he has made for himself by trying to add too many ornaments to it.

In his first volume, published fifty-nine years ago, he showed to the world a series of delicately-tinted portraits of ladies. "Claribel," "Lilian," "Isabel," "Mariana," "Madeline," "Adeline,"—his gorgeous set of pictures in arabesque, "Recollections of the Arabian Nights," "Love and Death," "The Dying Swan."

The appearance of this volume was not hailed as a revelation by the reading public. And indeed there was little in it to indicate the poet of "The Idyls of the King," of "The Princess" and of "In Memoriam," except a fineness of art which no English poet has yet surpassed or even equalled. If "Airy, fairy Lilian" is like a cherry-stone minutely carved, yet Tennyson was the first poet to show how delicately such work could be done. If "Mariana in the Moated Grange" is only an exercise in jewelled notes, what bard ever drew such exquisitely modulated



tones from his lyre before? If it is "a little picture painted well," where was the poet since Shakspeare who could have painted the picture so well? "The Owl," though many laughed at it, had something of the quality of Shakspeare's snatches of song.

There was not a trace of Byron in this utterance. The poet who had won the prize offered by Cambridge for English poetry, in 1829, and who somewhat earlier had seemed in despair over the death of Byron, did not utter fierce heroics. He painted pictures with a feeling for art that was new in literature. How this wonderful technical nicety struck the sensitive young readers of the time, Edmund Clarence Stedman tells us in "The Victorian Poets:"

"It is difficult now to realize how chaotic was the notion of art among English verse-makers at the beginning of Tennyson's career. Not even the example of Keats had taught the needful lesson, and I look on his successor's early efforts as of no small importance. These were dreamy experiments in metre and word-painting, and spontaneous after their kind. Readers sought not to analyze their meaning and grace. The significance of art has since become so well understood, and such results have been attained, that 'Claribel,' 'Lilian,' 'The Merman,' 'The Dying Swan' seem slight enough to us now; and even then the affectation pervading them, which was merely the error of a poetic soul groping for its true form of expression, repelled men of severe and established tastes; but to the neophyte they had the charm of sighing winds and bubbling waters, a wonder of luxury and weirdness, inexpressible, not to be effaced."

It was evident that Tennyson regarded poetry as an art. It was evident that this art was one that needed constant and persistent cultivation. It was evident that, deprived as he was of the material color of the painter, he was determined to make words flash, jewel-like, to make them

burn in crimson, or to convey with all the vividness of a Murillo, tints—not only the color, but the *tints*—of the sky, the earth, even of the atmosphere itself.

Let us take “Mariana.” Look at the picture. The subject is that of a woman waiting in a country house surrounded by a moat. It is a simple subject, not a complex or many-sided one. See how Tennyson gets as near color as words can. We may be sure that he cast and recast that poem many times before he printed it.

“With blackest moss the flower plots  
 Were thickly crusted, one and all ;  
 The rusted nails fell from the knots  
 That held the peach to the garden wall.  
 The broken sheds looked sad and strange,  
 Unlifted was the clinking latch ;  
 Weeded and worn the ancient thatch  
 Upon the lonely moated grange.”

• • • • •  
 “All day within the dreamy house,  
 The doors upon their hinges creak’d ;  
 The blue fly sung in the pane ; the mouse  
 Behind the mouldering wainscot shriek’d,  
 Or from the crevice peered about.”

Millet, in “The Angelus,” depicted sound by the magic of his brush which had the potent spell of color. Similarly, Tennyson, in “Mariana,” over-leaped the limitations of his art, and painted in words both color and sound and something more subtle than either.

Notice, too, how careful is his choice of epithets in this early book. He asks:

“Wherefore those faint smiles of thine,  
 Spiritual Adeline ?”

You will never find a fault of taste in Tennyson; and if you should find a trochee where you expected an iambus, be sure it is there because the musician willed a refreshing or effective discord. At the age of twenty-two, he published the volume containing "The Lady of Shalott," "Oenone," "Lady Clara Vere de Vere," "The May Queen," "The Miller's Daughter," "The Palace of Art," "Of Old Sat Freedom on the Heights," and half a dozen others equally famous, equally exquisite, and all showing an advance in power over his first volume and also a decrease in affectation. "The Lady of Shalott" is an allegory—for Tennyson, like all English poets from Chaucer to himself, is fond of allegories. In "The Lady of Shalott" we have the first hint of the poem we now know as "Elaine."

The Lady of Shalott is poetry, one of the helps to the intellectual progress of man. But, to remain strong and spiritual, poetry must be pure. It must not become worldly or earthy. It must weave its web high above the sordid aims of sin. And so the Lady of Shalott worked.

"There she weaves by night and day,  
A magic web with colors gay,  
She has heard a whisper say,  
A curse is on her if she stay  
To look down to Camelot,  
She knows not what the curse may be  
And so she weaveth steadily,  
And little other care hath she,  
The Lady of Shalott."

But, after a time, this wonderful lady who weaves into her web for the solace and delight of man all the sights

that pass her as shadows is tempted to go down from her spiritual height. She yields to the temptation and dies. In this allegory, we find the germ of *Elaine*, "the lily maid of Astolat."

Henri Taine, the clever French critic of English literature, who fails in his appreciation of Tennyson, as his compatriot, Voltaire, failed to rise to the heights of Shakespeare, tells us that, dissatisfied with the critics after the appearance of his second volume, Tennyson printed nothing for ten years. In 1842, his third volume appeared. It was called "English Idyls and Other Poems." This was the glorious fruition of a spring-time which had caught and garnered all the fresh beauty of the opening year. The April and May of the poet's first poems had ripened into June, and the June, azure-skied, rich, blooming, gave promise of even greater loveliness.

In "The Lady of Shalott," we found the hint of *Elaine*. In this new volume, we find studies for the great symphony to come—that English epic which is the poet's masterpiece. In this volume is that Homeric fragment—the *Morte d Arthur*—which is one of the finest passages ever written in any language. Dante never wrote anything more sustained in strength, more heroic in style, more reticent in expression and deeper in feeling than

"So all day long the noise of battle rolled."

But, to be logical, I must not consider the *Morte d Arthur* here. In its place in this third volume, it is really out of place. It belongs at the end of the complete Idyls,

all of which we have now. But in 1842, the world had only hints of them; in the third volume the most portentous hint was the *Morte d'Arthur*. There were others,—"St. Agnes," "Sir Galahad," "Sir Launcelot and Guinevere."

Looking through this third volume, you will find all the characteristics of the poet. Not only in the use of words carried to the highest point, the development of a fashion of blank verse which is as much Tennysonian as Spenser's verse is Spenserian, a love for classic forms and allusions; but in a great love for English landscapes, English country life, English modes of speeches, and English institutions. Above all, whether the poet tells us a Saxon legend like that of "Godiva;" a rustic idyl like "The Gardener's Daughter;" a modern story like "Dora," or a Middle-age legend like "The Beggar Maid," there permeates all his verse reverence for womanhood and purity and nobility of principle which is characteristic of all his work and all his moods. This is one reason why all women love Tennyson's poetry; for women are quicker than men to appreciate the pure and the true in literature. It is to Tennyson more than to any other man that we owe the elevation and purity of most of the public utterances of the nineteenth century. He, more than any other living writer, has both influenced and been influenced by his time. He is intensely modern. He is of the Victorian age as Shakspeare was of the Elizabethan age. In truth, as Ben Jonson and Shakspeare were representative of the spirit of their time, so Tennyson is the exponent of ours. When



he is highest, he is a leader; when lowest, a follower. He is reverential to Christianity; in the case of his most important work, "The Idyls of the King," he is almost Catholic in his spirit, because he has borrowed his legends from Catholic sources; but still "all his mind is clouded with a doubt."

Tennyson's doubt is evident even in that solemn and tender dirge, "In Memoriam," which formed his fifth volume, published a year after "The Princess," in 1850. The Greek poet, Moschus, wrote an elegy on his friend, Bion, and the refrain of this elegy, "Begin, Sicilian Muses, begin the lament" is famous. Tennyson, this modern poet, possessed of the Greek passion for symmetry and influenced as much by Theocritus, Mochus, and Bion as by the spirit of his own time, has made an elegy on his friend as solemn, as stately, as perfect in its form as that of Moschus; but not so spontaneous and tender. There is more pathos in King David's few words over the body of Absalom than in all the noble falls and swells of "In Memoriam." I doubt whether any heart in affliction has received genuine consolation from this decorous and superbly measured flow of grief. It is not a poem of Faith, nor is it a poem of doubt; but Faith and doubt tread upon each other's footsteps. Instead of the divine certitude of Dante, we have a doubting half belief. Tennyson loves the village church, the holly-wreathed baptismal font, the peaceful vicarage garden, the comfortable vicar, because they represent serenity and order. He detests revolution. If he lived before the coming of Christ,



in the vales of Sicily, he would probably have hated to see the rural spots of the pagans disturbed by the disciples of a less picturesque and natural religion. His belief is summed up in these words:

“ Behold we know not anything ;  
I can but trust that good shall fall,  
At last,—far off,—at last, to all,  
And every winter change to spring.  
“ So runs my dream ; but what am I ?  
An infant crying in the night :  
An infant crying for the light,  
And with no language but a cry.’

He believes in the immortality of the soul, and yet,—to use again the words he puts into the mouth of his own King Arthur,—“all his mind is clouded with a doubt.” He says:

“ My own dim life should teach me this,  
That life should live for evermore  
Else earth is darkness at the core,  
And dust and ashes all that is  
“ This round of green, this orb of flame,  
Fantastic beauty, such as lurks  
In some wild poet, when he works  
Without a conscience or an aim.  
“ What then were God to such as I ?  
’Twere hardly worth my while to choose  
Of things, all mortal, or to use  
A little patience ere I die ;  
“ ’Twere best at once to sink to peace,  
Like birds the charming serpent draws,  
To drop head foremost in the jaws  
Of vacant darkness and to cease.”

But he is possessed by the restlessness of our time.

He does not proclaim aloud that Christ lives; he looks on the faith of his sister with reverence, but he does not participate in it; his highest hope is that a new time will bring the faith that comes of self-control and that the "Christ that is to be" will come with the new year. To be frank, the Christianity of Tennyson seems to be little more tangible than the religion of George Eliot. He seems to hold that Christianity is good so far because no philosopher can offer the world anything better. Between the burning faith of Dante and the languid, half-sympathetic toleration of Tennyson, the gulf is as great as between the fervor of St. John the Evangelist and the mild beliefs of the modern broad-church Anglican divine. So much for the most noble elegy of our century, which needs only a touch of the faith and fire of Dante, to make it the grandest elegy of all time. Arthur Hallam, the subject of the "In Memoriam," had been Tennyson's dearest friend; he was engaged to marry the poet's sister. "He was," Tennyson himself said, in later years, "as perfect as mortal man could be." "In Memoriam" was a sincere tribute of love and genius to goodness and talent. Regret as we may the absence of that Christian certitude which can alone point upward unerringly from the mists of doubt, yet we must rejoice that the nineteenth century brought forth from the chaos of Byronic utterances and the pretty rhetorical paper-flower gardens of Rogers and Campbell a poem so pure in spirit and so pure in form.

Before considering "The Idyls of the King," that grand and exquisite epic, which combines the ideal of Christian

chivalry with the perfection of modern expression, I must call your attention to Tennyson's lyrics, especially to the little songs scattered through "The Princess." There is one lyric not in "The Princess" which must live forever. And when you ask why? I can only say because it is *poetry*. No man has ever yet exactly defined what poetry is. But if any man should ask me for illustrations of the most evanescent quality in poetry,—that quality which is utterly incapable of being defined, I should point to the "Break, Break, Break," of Tennyson and Longfellow's "Rainy Day." Tennyson's expression of the inexpressible,—Tennyson's crystallization of a mood is perfect,—

' Break, break, break,  
On thy cold, gray stones, O Sea,  
And I would that my tongue could utter  
The thoughts that arise in me.

"O, well for the fisherman's boy,  
That he shouts with his sister at play,  
O, well for the sailor lad,  
That he sings in his boat on the bay !

"And the stately ships go on  
To their haven under the hill ;  
But O, for the touch of a vanished hand,  
And the sound of a voice that is still !

"Break, break, break,  
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea,  
But the tender grace of a day that is dead  
Will never come back to me."

I must apologize for using the word "exquisite" so often. It is the only word by which we can express the art of these lovely—unsurpassingly lovely—little songs.

We owe "The Idyls of the King" to the fact that Alfred Tennyson read and pondered over Sir Thomas Malory's old black-letter legends of King Arthur's Round Table. Here he found the story of his epic ready made. In the form he adopted, we find the influence of Theocritus, who seems, of all poets who wrote in Greek, to have most influenced him. The title of his epic poem Tennyson took from Theocritus. The Idyls of Theocritus are short pastoral poems, full of sweetness, tenderness and love of rural life. In these qualities, Theocritus and Tennyson are much in sympathy. Theocritus was born about two hundred and eighty-four years before the birth of Our Lord. His songs are of Sicilian woods and nightingales, of the musical contests of shepherds. In Tennyson's "Oenone," we find many traces of Theocritus, even paraphrases on him. "Godiva" is formed on an idyl of Theocritus, and his famous lullaby is suggested by Theocritus' song of Alcmena over the infant Hercules.

Carlyle did not approve of Tennyson's reflections of the Greek. And he expressed it in his pleasant way. "See him on a dust-hill surrounded by innumerable dead dogs."

The term "Idyl," though applicable enough to the light and pastoral poems of Theocritus, was hardly so appropriate to the various parts of the Arthurian epic. But Tennyson has made the title his own; we love "The Idyls of the King" by the name he has re-created for them.

The "Idyls" are not complete. Though scattered through several volumes now, they will doubtless soon be given to us by the Laureate in logical sequence. They

follow each other in this order: "The Coming of Arthur," "Gareth and Lynette," "Enid," "Balin and Balan," "Vivien," "Elaine," "The Holy Grail," "Pelleas and Ettarre," "The Last Tournament," "Guinevere," and "The Passing of Arthur."

The "Idyls of the King" is an allegory, as well as an epic. It carries a great moral lesson. It is an epic of a failure,—a failure which falls on King Arthur and his knights because of the sin that crept among them, like a serpent, and left its trail over all. Arthur, the ideal king, the chivalrous servant of Christ, seems to represent the spiritual life. His Queen Guinevere is "sense at war with soul." She loves the things of earth better than those of heaven. And from her betrayal of the King,—her fall, like that of "The Lady of Shalott,"—her sinful love for Sir Launcelot, who represents the pride of the flesh,—flow all the many evils that fall on the court of King Arthur.

It is true that the allegorical meaning in some of the Idyls is dimmer than in others. Sometimes it seems to disappear altogether. I recommend to your attention a very ingenious interpretation made by Mr. Condé Pallen, of St. Louis, you will find in a recent volume of *The Catholic World*. I can hardly see my way clear to adopting the interpretation of Mr. Pallen, which attracted the favorable attention of Lord Tennyson; but to which the Laureate did not commit himself.

It is not fair to see in a poet's work more than he sees himself, and therefore I shall speak only of those allegorical meanings that are self-evident. It seems to me that

the allegorical character of the Idyls was something of an afterthought with Tennyson.

“The Coming of Arthur” is the first Idyl. King Arthur seems to typify the soul. There is a dispute about Arthur. The King Leodogran will not give Arthur, the knight who has saved him, his daughter Guinevere, until he is satisfied about Arthur’s birth. Some say he came from heaven, others that he was even as the earth. So men have disputed over the origin of the soul. There is no soul, some say,—no spiritual life. But Queen Bellicent cries out, describing the scene of Arthur’s coronation,—

“ But when he spake and cheer’d his Table Round  
With large, divine, and comfortable words  
Beyond my tongue to tell thee—I beheld  
From eye to eye thro’ all their Order flash  
A momentary likeness of the King :  
And ere it left their faces, thro’ the cross  
And those around it and the Crucified,

“ Down from the casement over Arthur smote  
Flame-color, vert and azure, in three rays,  
One falling upon each of three fair queens,  
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends  
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright  
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.”

The Lady of the Lake is there too, “clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful”—“a mist of incense curled about her.”

The three Queens are Faith, Hope, and Charity, on whom the colors symbolical of them,—flame-color, blue, and green,—fall from the crucifix in the stained glass of the casement,—the crucifix being the source of all grace.



There is no doubt that Arthur represents the spiritual soldier sent by Our Lord to conquer the unbelievers and make clean the land. The Lady of the Lake,—the Church,—gives him the sword Excalibur, which comes from the serene depth of an untroubled lake.

Merlin, the sage and magician, is human reason without grace, strong, quick to see, failing of being omnipotent because it lacks Faith. In a later Idyl, "Vivien" we see the grave sage who relies on the proud power of his intellect ruined by his weakness when approached by the temptations of sensuousness. The lesson of "Vivien" is that reason and the highest culture, of themselves, are not proof against corruption.

When the question is put to Merlin whether King Arthur was sent from heaven or not, he answers, as human culture too often does as to the origin of the soul, by a riddle. He says:

" Rain, rain, and sun ! a rainbow in the sky !  
A young man will be wiser by and by.  
An old man's wit may wander ere he die.

" Rain, rain, and sun ! a rainbow on the lea !  
And truth is this to me and that to thee ;  
And truth, or clothed, or naked, let it be.

" Rain, sun, and rain ! And the free blossom blows !  
Sun, rain, and sun, and where is he who knows !  
From the great deep to the great deep he goes ! "

This is the answer of modern skepticism to the questions of the soul. "Rain, sun, and rain!" he says. They exist because we see them. But, after all, it makes no difference whether you believe that there is beauty in

Heaven or no Heaven at all,—only the earth. Truth is only a mirage,—a delusion of the senses and the elements,—whether it seems of earthly or of heavenly origin. A young man will find this out, by and by, though the old man's wits may wander and he may take visions for realities.

“From the great deep to the great deep he goes.”

This is Herbert Spencer's answer to “The Unknowable.” And Pilate's doubt, “What is truth?” finds its echo in Merlin's cynical phrase,

“And truth is this to me and that to thee.”

The first Idyl has this line:

“The first night, the night of the new year,  
Was Arthur born.”

Let us observe, too, that King Arthur and Guinevere were married in May; for, through all the Idyls, the unity of time is carefully observed. The time in “Gareth and Lynette,” the second Idyl, is the late spring or early summer.

“For it was past the time of Easter Day.”

And Lynette says:

“Good Lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle in the hushed night.”

“Gareth and Lynette” is full of symbolism. Again, the Church appears more strongly symbolized. Gareth represents the strength of manhood, the Lady Lyonors, the spirit, and Lynette, imagination. I would advise you to analyze this poem more closely.

Next comes "Enid"—most lovely study of wifely graciousness and patience. Guinevere's sin has begun to work horrible evil unconscious to herself. It plants suspicion in Geraint's mind and causes Enid to suffer intolerably. The time is still in the summer.

I have alluded to the lesson of "Vivien." "Balin and Balan" precedes it with the same lesson. We shall pass "Vivien,"—the time is still summer, and a summer thunder storm breaks as Reason (Merlin) falls a prey to the seduction of Sensuality (Vivien):

"Elaine" follows. It is now midsummer. Guinevere and Launcelot begin to suffer for having betrayed the blameless King. Elaine, is "the lily maid of Astolat." Elaine has the charm of a wood-fawn,—the purity of dew on a lily. But she, too, must die, because of the sin of Guinevere and Launcelot, and because of her own wilfulness in loving Launcelot in spite of all. Is there anywhere in poetry a more pathetic, more beautiful picture than that of the "dead steered by the dumb" floating past the Castle of Camelot when the Queen had learned that the fairest and richest jewels are worse than dust when bought by sin. And Elaine—

"In her right hand the lily, in her left  
The letter—all her bright hair streaming down,  
And all the coverlid was cloth of gold  
Down to her waist, and she herself in white,  
All but her face, and that clear-featured face  
Was lovely, for she did not seem as dead,  
But fast asleep, and lay as though she smiled."

"The Holy Grail," which, allegorically and practically,

has puzzled most commentators, can have only its full signification to Catholics. It is doubtful whether Tennyson, taking the legend from the old romancers, has put any meaning into it other than he found in it. The time of "The Holy Grail" is still summer. In "Pelleas and Ettarre," we see again the growing evil worked by sin in King Arthur's plans for making the kingdom of Christ on earth. Sin grows and Faith fails; the strong become weak. Sir Galahad's strength is as the strength of ten because his heart is pure. The late summer is indicated by the "silent, seeded meadow grass." In the next Idyl, "The Last Tournament," when ruin begins to fall, the gloom of autumn lowers, we read of the "faded fields" and "yellowing woods." In "Guinevere," when the doom of sin falls on all the court, it is dreary winter.

"The white mist, like a face cloth to the face,  
Clung to the dead earth, and the land was still."

In the last of the Idyls,—in "The Passing of Arthur," we are in December,—at its close,—

"And the new sun rose, bringing the new year."

The splendid and blameless King lies by "the winter sea," defeated, helpless,—his Queen gone, his knights routed, his hopes fallen. Only Sir Bedivere, who seems to represent neither high Faith nor materialism, but something between the two,—is with him. At last, Sir Bedivere obeys and casts away the mystic blade, Excalibur. King Arthur, close by the "broken chancel with the broken cross," speaks the most solemn, most marvellous speech

in this greatest of the Idyls,—in which Tennyson the exquisite becomes for once Tennyson the sublime,—

“ And slowly answered Arthur from the barge ;  
‘ The old order changeth, yielding place to new.  
And God fulfils Himself in many ways  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.  
Comfort thyself : what comfort is in me ?  
I have lived my life, and that which I have done  
May He within Himself make pure ! but thou,  
If thou shouldst never see my face again,  
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer  
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice  
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.  
For what are men better than sheep or goats  
That nourish a blind life within the brain,  
If knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer  
Both for themselves and those that call them friend ?  
For so the whole, round earth is every way  
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.  
But now farewell.’ ”

The three Queens, clothed in black, gold-crowned, sail away with the blameless King in the barge, “dark as a funeral scarf,”—and he is seen no more

## LECTURE VI.

### TWO DRAMAS BY TENNYSON AND AUBREY DE VERE.

I AM very anxious to introduce to you a poet of whom I spoke in the lecture on Chaucer,—a poet who in many respects may be said to have inherited the mantle of Wordsworth. He was the intimate friend of that great poet; he is the friend of Tennyson and Browning; his name is a rallying word for all who believe that art may be Christian and poetic at the same time. Besides, he is acknowledged by the most careful and best equipped critics to be, in certain departments of poetry, unequalled. If he were not so Christian, I should, nevertheless, proclaim him as a poet who deserves to rank beside Tennyson. But as he is, above all, Christian, I am very happy in pointing out to you, among a race of literary neo-pagans, the one poet who is great as a poet, true as a man, magnificent in his adherence to Divine Truth, I mean Aubrey de Vere.

His father, Sir Aubrey de Vere, was also a poet,—of more warmth than the son, but of less elevation. In the sonnet—one of the most perfect forms of poetry of which our language admits—Aubrey de Vere works with love and success. He has written several that are almost flaw-



less, but he scarcely deserves the praises he has received for his sonnets. As Mrs. Meynell, a competent and sympathetic critic, says in a recent notice of him: "He frequently passes over the pauses which mark the relation of the parts; and his sonnets seem to have less vigor and movement than his unfettered lyrics. Nevertheless, many of them have a beauty and loftiness of thought which make them memorable poems, whatever they may be as sonnets."

But of the lyrical greatness of the "Search for Proserpine," the "Ode to the Daffodil," and "The Infant Bridal," there can be no question. Sir Henry Taylor, the author of the famous tragedy, "Philip Van Artevelde," wrote:

— "No lesser light  
Than was lit in Sydney's spirit clear,  
Or given to saintly Herbert's to diffuse,  
Now lives in thine, De Vere."

Even Swinburne, a poet so unlike him as to seem almost antagonistic, praises him.

The other day I said to you that you might be surprised to hear me mention the names of Aubrey de Vere and Tennyson in the same breath; to-day I shall give you my reasons. It would be absurd to say that De Vere is so exquisite a poet as Tennyson. But De Vere is a *grand* poet. De Vere is too cold, too classical to sing a song like the perfect bits of music in the "Princess." De Vere has written too much; we do not care to possess all his poems; whereas we need all of Tennyson's, except the

dramas. If De Vere had Tennyson's lightness and grace, his subtle excellence of diction; if Tennyson had the religious spirit of De Vere and his elevation of thought, the nineteenth century would need no other poet to make it complete.

My lecture to-day will help to prove that the best poetry in the English language owes its inspiration to the Catholic Church—which is Christianity in its highest form. I shall speak of the qualities of Tennyson and Aubrey de Vere in that great department of high poetry in which Shakespeare made his fame.

In picturesqueness and "tender grace of a day that is dead," the "Becket" of the laureate is vastly superior to the one which, after "Alexander the Great," has made Aubrey de Vere's name glorious in the literary annals of the nineteenth century. But a great tragedy on a subject which is what the Germans call "epoch-making" demand higher qualities than picturesqueness and that nameless grace and delicacy so essentially Tennysonian. It needs even higher qualities than the contrast of marked characters, pointed epigrams, or the fine play of poetic fancy. Lord Tennyson's "Becket" has all the lower qualities, Aubrey de Vere's "St. Thomas of Canterbury" all the higher. An oak is not more of an oak because the sward around is starred by violets and all the blooms of spring; and Aubrey de Vere's "St. Thomas" would not be a greater tragedy if it had the exquisite touches which the most delicate master of poetic technique the world has ever seen gives to his.

Tennyson's tragedy is meant to be an acting play, and it barely fails of being one; De Vere's is, frankly, a drama for the closet. Perhaps the lack of nobleness in Tennyson's is due to the necessity he felt of making it fit the arbitrary refinements of the stage. The episode of Fair Rosamond, which is an offence against historical truth, good art, and taste, would probably never have been introduced had the laureate not been required to give a leading dramatic lady something to do. Still, writers impregnated with the traditions of the Reformation are always crying: "*Cherchez la femme.*" If a man is holy and there is no disputing the fact, they construct a romance with a woman in it to account for his renunciations, and *vice versa*. Ten to one, if Tennyson is ever seized with the idea of putting the Blessed Thomas More into a tragedy, he will show to us the great chancellor dying, not as a martyr to religion, but as a martyr to human love. He has ruined a magnificent *persona* by making him, on the eve of his sublime death for the Church and freedom, drivel of what he might have gained had he married. In the monastery at Canterbury, just before the bell rings that calls him to his doom, he sighs lackadaisically:

"There was a little fair-haired Norman maid  
Lived in my mother's house: if Rosamond is  
The world's rose, as her name imports her—she  
Was the world's lily.

JOHN OF SALISBURY:

"Ay, and what of her?

BECKET:

"She died of leprosy.

JOHN OF SALISBURY :

" I know not why  
You call these old things back, my lord.

BECKET :

" The drowning man, they say, remembers all  
The chances of his life, just ere he dies."

Possibly this discord may not strike the audience which, in "Queen Mary," "Harold," and "Becket," Tennyson addresses himself to. But to a Catholic it is fatal to whatever harmony he might have found in the tragedy. Surely the poet who gave us a type of purity in Sir Galahad, and of chaste elevation in King Arthur, might have better understood the character of the martyred successor of St. Anselm. It is impossible to approach the climax, or rather anti-climax, of Tennyson's play without impatience and irritation. If

" To be wroth with one we love  
Doth work like madness in the brain,"

the discovery that a true poet has misunderstood a grand character and frittered away a sublime opportunity is an incentive, too, to a helpless and hopeless sort of anger.

In Aubrey de Vere's "St. Thomas" there is no anti-climax, no disappointment. We miss sometimes the flowers that might grow around the foot of the oak, but the oak towers majestic. "St. Thomas" possesses what many of us thought lacking in the less ambitious poems of an author who has given out much light without heat—sustained intensity of passion. Added to this, Aubrey de Vere

thoroughly understands the historical meaning of St. Thomas' time and the relations of the great chancellor and primate to that time. Of these the laureate seems to be in the densest ignorance. If in "Queen Mary" he drew his facts from Froude, and in "Harold" from Bulwer-Lytton, he appears in "Becket" to have depended on his own inner consciousness for his "history." He has, in the most important particulars, ignored the authentic chronicles of his time.

It was, indeed, an "epoch-making" time, and one worthy of a grand commemoration in an immortal poem. England owes her liberty to the Church; and, more than all, to St. Anselm and St. Thomas, because they first withstood the advancing waves of royal despotism. And the freedom of the Church was the freedom of the people. St. Anselm put into the "Mariale" the echoes of the wails of the Saxon people, beaten down by Norman conquerors who would have been utter brutes—for the Berserker spirit was strong in them—were it not for the influence of the Church. The Saxons saw their priests made powerless, their Church enslaved, and themselves in hopeless serfdom—more crushing even than the slavery which Ireland endured from the same hands—when suddenly that Church which knows no nationality, which fuses all nations into one, asserted her might in the persons of two primates; one of the conquering race, the other of the foreigner's court. The position of St. Thomas à Becket has been misinterpreted so utterly that he is often set down as an ambitious revolutionist who tried, in the interests of ecclesi-

astical tyranny, to dominate both king and people. In truth, the Archbishop of Canterbury struggled for old English laws against new ones devised by the Normans to rivet more closely the fetters of serfdom on the Saxon people.

It has been made a reproach against St. Thomas that he resisted the "Royal Customs," that he figured as a haughty prince of the Church scorning the pretensions of the Plantagenet, and that he died a martyr to his obstinate desire to crush even royal freedom, that he and his monks might triumph. This view is founded on a misconception of the nature of the Royal Customs. They were not old Customs, but innovations invented by the conquerors for their autocratic purposes. Aubrey de Vere puts into Becket's mouth this description of these famous Customs. The Earl of Cornwall says:

" You serve the king  
Who stirred these wars? who spurned the Royal Customs?

BECKET :

" The Customs—ay, the Customs? We have reached  
At last—'twas time—the inmost of this plot,  
Till now so deftly veiled and ambushed. ' Customs !'  
O specious word, how plausibly abused !  
In Catholic ears that word is venerable ;  
To Catholic souls custom is law itself,  
Law that its own foot hears not, dumbly treading  
A holy path smoothed by traditions old.  
I war not, sirs, on way traditionary ;  
The Church of Christ herself is a tradition ;  
Ay, 'tis God's tradition, not of men !  
Sir, these your Customs are God's laws reversed,  
Traditions making void the Word of God,



Old innovations from the first withstood,  
 The rights of holy Church, the poor man's portion,  
 Sold, and for naught, to aliens. Customs! Customs!  
 Custom was that which to the lord of the soil  
 Yielded the virgin one day wedded! Customs!  
 A century they have lived ; but he ne'er lived,  
 The man that knew their number or their scope,  
 Where found, by whom begotten, or how named :  
 Like malefactors long they hid in holes ;  
 They walked in mystery like the noontide pest ;  
 In the air they danced ; they hung on breath of princes,  
 Largest when princes' lives were most unclean,  
 And visible most when rankest was the mist.  
 Sirs, I defy your Customs : they are naught :  
 I turn from them to our old English laws,  
 The Confessor's and those who went before him,  
 The charters old, and sacred oaths of kings :  
 I clasp the tables twain of Sinai :  
 On them I lay my palms, my heart, my forehead,  
 And on the altars dyed by martyrs' blood,  
 Making to God appeal."

These were the Customs that St. Thomas resisted to the death. In this speech, so full of dignity and fire, Aubrey de Vere has distorted no facts for the sake of effect. Indeed, throughout the whole of his work he departs in nothing, except in the episode of Idonea de Lisle, the ward of Becket's sister, from the chronicled truth. Idonea, a rich heiress, pursued by the ruffianly knight De Broc, who "roamed a-preying on the race of men," took refuge with Becket's sister and was protected by the power of the primate. De Broc gained the king's ear, and, "on some pretence of law," drove Idonea from the house of Becket's sister. De Broc and his friends sued for her as a royal ward:

“Judgment against her went. The day had come,  
 And round the minster knights and nobles watched :  
 The chimes rang out at noon : then from the gate  
 Becket walked forth, the maiden by his side :  
 Ay, but her garb conventual showed the nun !  
 They frowned, but dared no more.”

The feminine interest, to give which to his tragedy Tennyson invented a new version of the legend of Fair Rosamond, is supplied by Aubrey de Vere in this very fitting episode of *Idonea*. It is artistic and congruous. *Idonea* is exiled from England when the king's wrath bursts on all the relatives, friends, and dependents of *À Becket*; she finds refuge with the Empress Matilda, mother of the king. Then occurs a scene between the empress and the novice which for spiritual as well as intellectual elevation has seldom been equalled.

One would think that it would have been easy to give the necessary feminine element to “*Becket*” by the use of an underplot; but Tennyson has preferred to bring the king's mistress, a “light o' love,” Fair Rosamond, into intimate association with the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose chastity, even before he took orders, amid all the temptations of a court presided over by a loose-minded Provençal queen, was proverbial. Fair Rosamond is rehabilitated for the purpose of the laureate. She is made to be, in her own eyes, the lawful wife of King Henry, and the chancellor—not yet made primate—promises the king to protect her against the vengeance of Queen Eleanor. Becket, having become primate and gained the hatred of the king, does so; and, in a dagger-scene quite worthy of

a sensational play, saves her from Eleanor's fury. After that he induces her to leave her son and begin a novitiate in Godstow convent, from which she emerges, with the countenance of the abbess, disguised as a monk. She is thus present at the murder of the archbishop, and her presence excites that tender retrospection so in keeping with theatrical traditions, but so shockingly contrary to the martyr's character and the truth of history. It is here that Becket says, according to Tennyson:

"Dan John, how much we lose, we celibates,  
Lacking the love of woman and of child!"

John of Salisbury seeks to give the archbishop consolation for his supposed loss, in a most ungallant and pessimistic tone smacking somewhat of "sour grapes:"

"More gain than loss ; for of your wives you shall  
Find one a slut, whose fairest linen seems  
Foul as her dust-cloth, if she used it ; one  
So charged with tongue, that every thread of thought  
Is broken ere it joins—a shrew to boot,  
Whose evil song far on into the night  
Thrills to the topmost tile—no hope but death ;  
One slow, fat, white, a burthen of the hearth ;  
And one that, being thwarted, ever swoons  
And weeps herself into the place of power."

This is hardly the way in which a sturdy and ascetic priest and counsellor would talk to an archbishop who, almost at the moment of martyrdom, would begin to look back at "lost chances" of love and matrimony. These touches of false sentiment show how impossible it is for Tennyson to comprehend a priest of the Church. How different, but how true is the note struck by Aubrey de

Vere! Becket has been just made primate, and he bursts into the splendid speech to Herbert of Bosham:

“ Herbert ! my Herbert !  
High visions, mine in youth, upbraid me now ;  
I dreamed of sanctities redeemed from shame ;  
Abuses crushed ; all sacred offices  
Reserved for spotless hands. Again I see them ;  
I see God’s realm so bright, each English home  
Sharing that glory basks amid its peace :  
I see the clear flame on the poor man’s hearth  
From God’s own altar lit ; the angelic childhood ;  
The chaste, strong youth ; the reverence of white hairs :  
’Tis this Religion means. O Herbert ! Herbert !  
We must secure her this. Her rights, the lowest  
Shall in my hand be safe. I will not suffer  
The pettiest stone in castle, grange, or mill,  
The humblest clod of English earth, one time  
A fief of my great mother, Canterbury,  
To rest caitiff’s booty. Herbert, Herbert,  
Had I foreseen, with what a vigilant care  
Had I built up my soul ! ”

His pupil, young Prince Henry, is heard singing without, and he says, in contrast to the whines put into his mouth by Tennyson:

“ Hark to that truant’s song ! We celibates  
Are strangely captured by this love of children  
Nature’s revenge—say, rather compensation.”

Catholics whose childhood has been passed among religious will recognize the truth of this, as well as the falseness of Tennyson’s point of view. Exiled in the Abbey of Pontigny, after the king has poured his wrath on him and his kindred for defending the liberties of the Church and the people, he does not break out into wild regret or

sentimental sighs. There is manly tenderness in his tone to the abbot:

"My mother, when I went to Paris first,  
A slender scholar bound on quest of learning,  
Girdling my gown collegiate, wept full sore,  
Then laid on me this hest : both early and late  
To love Christ's Mother and the poor of Christ.  
That so her prayer in heaven and theirs on earth,  
Beside me moving as I walked its streets,  
Might shield me from its sins."

ABBOT :

"Men say your mother  
Loved the poor well, and still on festivals,  
Laying her growing babe in counter-scale,  
Heaped up an equal weight of clothes and food,  
Which unto them she gave."

It would be necessary to apologize for giving many quotations, tempting as their beauty is, were it not for the fact that mere allusion to them would not suffice. It is regrettable that among Catholics—and the present writer speaks from observation—Tennyson's "Becket," printed in 1884, is better known than De Vere's "St. Thomas," an American edition of which appeared in 1876.

Aubrey de Vere's conception of the motives of the martyred primate is worthy of a Catholic poet. Tennyson grasps only faintly the Christianity of À Becket. It does not come home to him, it does not touch him, because in his experience he has never come in contact with the inner life of a devout priest, and therefore his imagination is not equal to the task of evolving one. Of the real meaning of asceticism he is entirely ignorant. The

pride and the impatience of his Becket are only equalled by the self-conceit of his St. Simon Stylites.

In the dialogue between the abbot of Pontigny and the exiled archbishop, just quoted, there is an example of Catholic belief which, like sustaining gold threads in a tissue of silk, runs through the wonderful tragedy of *De Vere's*. The chancellor is made the primate; he becomes less gay, less worldly, more given to the building-up of his soul and his mind, and more spiritual. He, almost alone, stands up for the Church and the people. Time-serving court bishops cower; the very court of Rome—but not the Church—seems to desert him. The pope himself sends him the habit of the monks of Pontigny, with the cowl filled with snow—"the pope knows well some heads are hot." The archbishop endures it all with the meekness of a saint, yet with the dignity of a man. Through all trials, up to the time of martyrdom, he seems marked for special grace. He is not singularly learned, for the practical duties of the kingdom have left him little time for study. And yet he is well equipped with fortitude and his hope never falters. Why? We are answered: because his mother has loved God and the poor, and because he so loves Christ's poor, following her behest. This essentially Catholic point is accentuated most sharply and artistically by the author.

Tennyson draws very sharply the envious and the fawning prelates around the king, and his characterization is as keen and delicate as we have had every reason to expect it to be. But the virtuous priests in "*Becket*" are



certainly a strange group. We know that the Church in England, half-enslaved by the state and burdened with growing wealth, had need of reforms in discipline. Aubrey de Vere, with a regard for truth which has probably caused guileless Protestants to expect to see him crushed by the thunder of Rome, makes the pious Empress Matilda say:

“ I would your primate  
Had let the Royal Customs be, and warred  
Against the ill customs of the Church. 'Tis shame  
To ordain a clerk in name that lacks a cure,  
Whom idleness must needs ensnare in crime,  
Scandal—and worse—to screen an erring clerk,  
More fearing clamor than the cancer slow  
Of wily wasting sin. Scandal it is  
When seven rich benefices load one priest,  
Likeliest his soul's damnation.”

JOHN OF SALISBURY :

“ Scandals indeed !  
And no true friend to Thomas is the man  
Who palliates such abuses. For this cause  
Reluctantly he grasped Augustine's staff,  
Therewith to smite them down. Madam, the men  
Who brand them most are those who breed the scandals.  
The primate warred on such. The king, to shield them,  
Invoked the Royal Customs.”

We understand all this, and no Catholic of to-day attempts to palliate abuses which crept into the discipline of the Church. It is evident that Aubrey de Vere does not whiten the courtiers and sycophants, although clothed with episcopal authority, who shrank from St. Thomas at the king's scowl. He is even more pitiless to them than Tennyson. Tennyson, however, does not seem to see the anomaly of making an archbishop—a saint canonized by

Rome—show an insubordinate and mutinous spirit which almost justifies the hot words that King Henry is made to address to him:

No! God forbid and turn me Mussulman!  
 No god but one, and Mahomet is his prophet.  
 But for your Christian, look you, you shall have  
 None other god but me—me, Thomas, son  
 Of Gilbert Becket, London merchant."

Tennyson's Becket has a most persistent habit of repartee. The repartee is sometimes very apt, but very unsaintly. Indeed, if the laureate had made Wycliff the hero of his tragedy, some of the speeches would be in keeping with the sentiments of that over-glorified Lollard.

It may be said that Tennyson's idea of St. Thomas is very human, and that the poet has well depicted in rushing words a proud nature towering and neither bending nor breaking. Tennyson's Becket is well enough painted from that point of view. There are some exquisitely fine natural touches. But the poet-laureate had no right to attempt to depict the character of St. Thomas merely from that point of view. Pride and enthusiasm would never have made a Christian martyr of Thomas à Becket, and it is the full understanding of this that, leaving out other qualities, makes Aubrey de Vere the greater poet and the truer delineator of a hero whom it is almost sacrilege to misrepresent for the sake of a theatrical *succès d'estime*. The character of St. Thomas à Becket belongs to Christendom and to history, and the poet-laureate, rushing in where angels fear to tread, not caring for or understanding the sacredness of his subject, has done both

Christendom and art a wrong by dragging an effigy of the martyred primate in the dust. It used to be the fashion to overlook the liberties that poets and romance-writers took with history; but since historians have become romancers, and even adopted the adjectives of the poets, we are more exacting. No excuse can be offered for Tennyson's falsification of the character of A Becket—not even an excuse that he needed dramatic color. He had a noble figure and a sublime time, and he belittled them both, because he would not understand them, or because the success of a play he had adapted from Boccaccio made him anxious for the applause of the frequenters of theatres.

Tennyson, echoing, perhaps, some sectarian preacher, causes the pope's almoner to suggest treachery to the archbishop when the king is urging him to sign the articles against the freedom of the Church. Philip de Eleemosyna tempts the archbishop to grievous sin by whispering that the pope wants him to commit it:

“Cannot the pope absolve thee if thou sign?”

This might be forgiven in a tract against popery, on the score of ignorance; but what plea can be offered for it in the careful, overwrought work of a poet whose fame is world wide and whose knowledge should not be much narrower?

Becket bursts out in this speech:

“Map scoffs at Rome: I all but hold with Map.  
Save for myself no Rome were left in England:  
All had been his. Why should this Rome, this Rome,

Still choose Barabbas rather than the Christ,  
 Absolve the left-hand thief and damn the right?  
 Take fees of tyranny, wink at sacrilege,  
 Which even Peter had not dared? condemn  
 The blameless exile?"

Is this the language of a Christian hero? Are these revilings of the Power he is willing to die for consistent naturally or true artistically? Herbert of Bosham, the archbishop's faithful friend, a devout cleric and a sensible man according to good authorities, is made to drivel:

"Thee, thou holy Thomas,  
 I would that thou hadst been the Holy Father."

To which Tennyson's archbishop complacently replies:

"I would have done my most to keep Rome holy:  
 I would have made Rome know she still is Rome,  
 Who stands aghast at her eternal self  
 And shakes at mortal kings—her vacillation,  
 Avarice, craft. O God! how many an innocent  
 Has left his bones upon the way to Rome,  
 Unwept, uncared for! Yea, on mine self  
 The king had had no power, except for Rome.  
 'Tis not the king who is guilty of mine exile,  
 But Rome, Rome, Rome!"

Was there ever an honest and faithful priest and friend so misrepresented by a poet dazzled by the glare of the footlights? Was ever a saint and martyr more besmeared with mock heroic pride and selfishness?

Chroniclers tell us that St. Thomas was serene and dignified in all trials, but "Becket's" serenity is frequently swept away in gusts of evil temper, and he is quite as foul-mouthed as the enemies that bait him. The prelates around him wrangle like school-boys, and the scene at

Northampton is simply a free quarrel. Aubrey de Vere, comprehending that the key to St. Thomas' conduct must be found in a supernatural manner, avoids the almost brutal mistakes of the laureate. The scene of the signing of the Royal Customs by À Becket was really at Clarendon; Tennyson transfers it to Roehampton. De Vere treats this scene with keen perception and admirable reticence. The archbishop does not forget himself or burst into violent assertions. He is made to explain the episode of the almoner, which Tennyson treats in a truly evangelical way. He tells how he was deluded into signing the articles. It is very different from the version in which the pope's envoy whispers that one may sin freely and be sure of absolution!

“ Came next the papal envoy from Aumone,  
 With word the pope, moved by the troublous time,  
 Willed my submission to the royal will.  
 This was the second fraud ; remains the third.  
 My lords, the Customs named till then were few.  
 In evil hour I yielded—pledged the Church,  
 Alas! to what I know not. On the instant  
 The king commanded, ‘ Write ye down these laws.’  
 And soon, too soon, a parchment pre-ordained  
 Upon our table lay, a scroll inscribed  
 With usages sixteen, whereof most part  
 Were shamefuller than the worst discussed till then.  
 My lords, too late I read that scroll : I spurned it ;  
 I swore by Him who made the heavens and earth  
 That never seal of mine should touch that bond,  
 Not mine, but juggle-changed. My lords, that eve  
 A truthful servant and a fearless one,  
 Who bears my cross—and taught me, too, to bear one—  
 Llewellen is his name, remembered be it !—  
 Probed me, and probed with sharp and searching words ;

And as the sun my sin before me stood,  
My lords, for forty days I kept my fast,  
And held me from the offering of the Mass,  
And sat in sackcloth ; till the pope sent word,  
Arise ; be strong and walk !' And I arose,  
And hither came ; and here confession make  
That till the cleansèd leper once again  
Take, voluntary, back his leprosy,  
I with those Royal Customs stain no more  
My soul, which Christ hath washed."

This is not the talk of Tennyson's ill-tempered and sharp-tongued Becket, but the sense, if not the exact words, of the real Becket. De Vere's consummate skill in building up bit by bit the character of the archbishop, in accordance with the character given him by authentic writers, is worthy of careful analysis. The primate asked of his servants their honest opinions of this conduct, and accepted opinions thus frankly tendered as his guide. The flattery of Tennyson's Herbert of Bosham, so complacently swallowed by the laureate's political primate, would have brought down the censure of the real St. Thomas. De Vere characterizes Llewellen, the Welsh cross-bearer, by a nice touch:

"The tables groaned with gold ; I scorned the pageant,  
The Norman pirates and the Saxon boors  
Sat round and fed ; I hated them alike,  
The rival races, one in sin. Alone  
We Britons tread our native soil."

In the death-scene Tennyson sins unpardonably. He shows us the archbishop rushing to his death from obstinacy and want of self-control. De Brito, Fitzurse, and De Tracy have come to put into act the hasty words of the



king and to murder the archbishop. Becket rails at them bitterly, throws Fitzurse from him and pitches De Tracy "headlong," after the manner of the muscular Christian heroes beloved of the late Rev. Charles Kingsley. He even sneers at the monks whom Tennyson makes to flee. "Our dove-cote flown," he says—"I cannot tell why monks should all be cowards." He still repeats the sneer, until Grim, whose arm is broken by a blow aimed at Becket, reminds him that *he* is a monk. Rosamond rushes in and begs the murderers to spare the archbishop, and then he is slain, just as a thunderstorm breaks; this climax, which in Aubrey de Vere's tragedy follows strictly the authentic account of the sacrilege, is made trivial by a silly *coup de théâtre*.

There is nothing in Tennyson's "Becket" to compare with the lyrics in "The Princess," or even the lute song in "Queen Mary;" but they are airy and expressive of the mood of the persons in whose mouths they are placed. Queen Eleanor sings:

"Over ! the sweet summer closes,  
The reign of the roses is done ;  
Over and gone with the roses,  
And over and gone with the sun.

"Over ! the sweet summer closes,  
And never a flower at the close ;  
Over and gone with the roses,  
And winter again and the snows "

It is quite in accordance with the mood of the light-minded queen, who is quite past the August of life, who

has been wedded more for her rich possessions than herself, and who is far from her gay debonair Aquitaine.

Queen Eleanor does not sing in the similar scene in Aubrey de Vere's tragedy. She turns to a trouvère and asks him to sing. And he begins:

"I make not songs, but only find ;  
Love following still the circling sun,  
His carol casts on every wind,  
And other singer is there none.

"I follow Love, though far he flies ;  
I sing his song, at random found,  
Like plume some bird-of-paradise  
Drops, passing, on our dusky bound.

"In some, methinks, at times there glows  
The passion of some heavenlier sphere .  
These too I sing ; but sweetest those  
I dare not sing and sweetly hear."

This is a smooth setting of a thought which both Keats and Maurice de Guérin, and no doubt all poets, have tried to express ; but Queen Eleanor, and perhaps the sensitive reader, finds it lacking as a lyric. The trouvère then sings another about Phoebus and Daphne. Queen Eleanor very aptly cries:

"A love-song that ! An icicle it is  
Added to winter."

But if Aubrey de Vere's lyrical touch is hard and cold in comparison with Tennyson's, even when Tennyson's lyrics are not his best, he has the advantage, in all the higher attributes of a dramatic poet, in limning Queen Eleanor, who was a creature of the senses, yet still a princess and of no mean capabilities. Tennyson gives

the impression that she was half-crazed—a kind of Provencal Bacchante, and her first entrance destroys all respect for her sanity.

Aubrey de Vere's "Saint Thomas of Canterbury" has a foil in "Becket" which, by contrast, makes it glow and seem more full of lustre and color, as a diamond of flawless purity when put in a circle of brilliants. It is hard to account for the blindness of the poet of the "Idyls of the King" in venturing to attempt a work that had already been perfectly done. Aubrey de Vere's place as a great dramatic poet was settled when "Alexander the Great" appeared. "Saint Thomas of Canterbury" was not needed to teach the world what he could do. But he has given it out of the abundance of his heart; and we Catholics, who have the key of faith with which to unlock its mysteries, which are unknown to a poet of even Tennyson's insight, may thank God that he has raised up a seer at once strong, pure, true to his ideals both in religion and art, more than worthy to wear the mantle that fell from the shoulders of Wordsworth, and with much of the divine fire that made Shakspeare an arbiter of English thought and speech.

## LECTURE VII.

### SOME WOMEN WRITERS.

I HOPE you will forgive me for not using the word "poetess" in this lecture. In my opinion a woman who writes poetry should not be ashamed to be called by the name which distinguishes Dante, Calderon, Shakspeare, Longfellow and many other immortals.

This century is the century of women writers. The results of the great social change consequent from the discovery of America and the French Revolution are more apparent now than ever in the education of young girls and the status of women. Our grandparents looked with horror on the probability of a woman's working for a living or working at all, except in the household. She could embroider hideous samples, draw buttercups and daisies, paint landscapes in which the cows might have been horses and the lambs dogs; she was expected to be "sweetly pretty," and ivy-like and clinging; her proper dress was supposed to be white muslin; she wore thin slippers and, on festive occasions, a wreath of roses; she sang "Lightly the Troubadour Touched his Guitar" and played "The Battle of Prague." Her fathers and brothers worked for her; but no matter how clever she was, or how desirous of not burdening them she might be, it was not

permitted that she should work outside the family circle. To be other than this, social convention decreed, was to be "strong-minded." And to be "strong-minded" was to be wicked, or worse than wicked. But all that is changed now. Young women are no longer content to be amateurs. They have learned that society has become more exacting. The young woman of the present time cannot be satisfied with such accomplishments as the making of wax fruit and flowers, or the playing of a fantasia with a note dropped out of every fourth bar. She endeavors to acquire a specialty; for, if she be rich—so uncertain is the duration of fortunes in our country—she may need it to help her live, and perhaps—who knows?—to enable her to support a husband in the luxuries to which he has been accustomed. For sometimes the American girl elopes, and in that case she soon thanks Heaven that she has been taught to earn her own bread.

There still remains in that small stratum of society in which idleness is cultivated as the principal grace, a prejudice against young women who work for their living. But a prejudice founded on no principle is disreputable. And even this prejudice, which is really not worth considering, melts before talent and industry. The musician, the composer, the singer, the artist, the writer are the hardest of workers, and yet society—meaning the would-be exclusive class—is only too eager to welcome and, unfortunately, sometimes to spoil them; so that there is no bar now to a woman's cultivation of the best that is in her. Twenty-five years ago, the woman who could play a great

composition of Chopin or of Berlioz was a rarity, a phenomenon. Now there are hundreds in every city who can do it. Every year the publishers of the magazines receive cleverer and cleverer illustrations from young women. Young women no longer paint a castle on the Rhine with a bridge in the foreground spanning the river, done in bright blue with yellow high lights and weeping willows of arsenic green dipping into the turgid stream. That belongs to the past of the sampler and the dogs and cats worked in Berlin wool.

MRS. BROWNING.

Similarly, the young lady is no longer satisfied with composition; subject: "Sunshine." She wants to get beyond that, and she does. If she have literary talent, if she cultivate her taste, if she pay attention to form,—for literature is an art governed by rules as strict as those which govern painting or music,—she may earn, not only position in the world which recognizes all good work, especially in literature, but an honorable income. Since Miss Austen and Miss Edgeworth's time, the number of women writers has steadily increased. We have too many of them, unfortunately,—too many who have sacrificed all that best becomes a woman for the sake of sensationalism and money-getting. But, if we have Ouida, "The Duchess," Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and the vulgarest of them all,—Amélie Rives on one side, we have Adelaide Procter, Christian Reid, Eleanor Donnelly, Lady Georgiana Fullerton, Mrs. Craven,—who, however, has an unhappy



habit of making cousins marry at the end of her stories,—on the other. George Sand, a woman who tried to be a man, had genius, but no morals. George Eliot, another great woman writer, had genius, but no religion. Their lives were sad and their deaths sad. They are warnings to women that even genius and success cannot compensate for their unsexing themselves. A woman is admirable in proportion to her womanliness. And a poet who wrote in prose has said that a woman without religion is like a rose without perfume. Among the women of our century there is one English woman poet who towers above the rest—a woman who expressed great thoughts; who, aside from her philosophy and her Italian politics, deserves a high place in that private literary oratory which each of us should erect. I speak of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. If ever any poet stood in the white light of the beauty which we call poetry, it was Mrs. Browning. Her thoughts were as fire and her words were as fire. You remember the majestic opening of her “*Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus*.” It was suggested by Milton’s

But see the Virgin blest  
Has laid her Babe to rest.”

Mrs. Browning’s prelude runs thus:

“Sleep, sleep, mine Holy One!  
My flesh, my Lord!—what name? I do not know,  
A name that seemeth not too high or low,  
Too far from me or Heaven.  
My Jesus, that is best! that word being given  
By the majestic angel whose command  
Was softly as a man’s beseeching said

When I and all the earth appeared to stand  
 In the great overflow  
 Of light celestial from his wings and head,  
 Sleep, sleep, my Saving One."

And the cry of the children:

"Do you hear the children weeping, O my brothers,  
 Ere the sorrow comes with years?  
 They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,  
 And *that* cannot stop their tears.  
 The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,  
 The young birds are chirping in their nest,  
 The young fauns are playing with the shadows,  
 The young flowers are blowing toward the west—  
 But the young, young children, O my brothers,  
 They are weeping bitterly!  
 They are weeping in the playtime of the others,  
 In the country of the free!"

Spontaneous as Mrs. Browning's poetry seems, it would have been made greater by a finer art, although the poet made herself a scholar and her poetry was greatly influenced by the Greeks.

I must warn you that, in a lesser poet, Mrs. Browning's faults of art would not be tolerated. She made herself a scholar, it is true; she was influenced by Theocritus, as Tennyson was; but not so much by the perfect symmetry of the Greeks as by their thoughts. I regret that most women poets are careless just where one would expect to find them careful—in matters of detail. Mrs. Browning's rhythm and rhyme are sometimes so bad as to put the critical reader or the musical reader out of patience. It must be said, too, that Mrs. Browning's characters in her long poems, "Aurora Leigh" and "Lady Geraldine's Court-

ship" are unreal. They are "imagination at a white heat." Lady Geraldine is an unwomanly woman; and Romney Leigh is a very weak-minded fool. Nevertheless, looked at as a poet, not as a story-teller or an artist,—in the sense that Tennyson is an artist,—Mrs. Browning is the greatest of the women poets. Mrs. Browning, when criticised for her bad rhymes, replied that poetry with her was not "reverie, but art." If this be true, we can only conclude that she had a very poor ear for sound. Somebody made a list of the defective rhymes in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship." For instance:

"Door-ways—poor-ways; nature—satire; woman—gloaming; invited—freighted; terrace—heiress; symbol—humble; islands—silence; making—speaking; chamber—remember; coming—woman; weakness—blackness; mercies—curses; earthly—worthy,"—and many more.

Mrs. Browning's love and sympathy for children are pronounced in her poems. If Mrs. Browning gained Heaven—and who can tell?—it was through her love for the poor and of helpless little children. Mrs. Browning's art was not perfect; but her voice, with a discord now and then, came straight from her heart. If you read nothing else of Mrs. Browning, read at least "At Cowper's Grave," or "The Sleep,"—written on that Scriptural passage so beloved of poets,—"*He Giveth His Beloved Sleep.*" In Mrs. Browning's "Vision of Poets" there is a strong suggestion of Tennyson, as there is in Mrs. Meynell's "Sonnet to a Daisy," which I shall speak of later.

Mrs. Browning owes almost as much to Theocritus as Tennyson. And her paraphrase on the idyls of the

Syracusan poet are very charming. Faulty in *technique*, she is nevertheless an artist. One of the lessons of her life which I may read to you, young ladies, is: never to be satisfied with mediocrity; to cultivate your talents to their utmost, and to leave no chance for mental improvement pass by. I am not recommending the pursuit of poetry as a profession; no amount of application will make a poet; but no poet, no matter how high his genius is, can afford to neglect the rules of art. I may here quote for you the opinion of one of the oldest and the most gifted of our living American poets, Mr. C. H. Stoddard, on the relations of poetry to the art of expression. He says:

“We won’t quote Flaccus, although he is always worth quoting; but the best thing an amateur poet can do is to rewrite and rewrite his verses, over and over and over again, seeking out the smallest errors, and occasionally resorting to bore a friend with reading them, and making all the changes that friends suggest—perhaps permanently, perhaps only temporarily. By that time the would-be poet will be disgusted with his own work. That is the moment when it becomes fit for anybody else to read, if there was a germ of poetry in it to begin with. After that the aspirant for the bay may lay away his mutilated treasure as long as he can stand it, then bring it out and rewrite it and polish it,—and send it to a newspaper or magazine with a safe bet of ten to one that it will be rejected. Out of the throes of many such workers a good poem might occasionally come forth—say once in a hundred times. The proportion now is about one in a million.”

This is rather too severe; but it has truth in it. To console, I may say that no true poem ever lacked a hearing. If the Milton is inglorious, it is because he is mute; and if a great thought which you have does not reach the people, it is because you are too slothful to cut your rough

diamond into shape. A perfect poem is a perfect gem, with each facet cut—God knows with what pain—until it reflects the light on all sides.

MISS PROCTER.

I am anxious to call your attention to two writers whom you know and love already, Adelaide Procter and Lady Georgiana Fullerton. There are two poets whom the high literary sect profess to underrate,—Longfellow and Adelaide Procter. Longfellow has no superior among our modern poets; and if Adelaide Procter is a lesser light than Elizabeth Browning, it is only in the degree that the flame of a prairie fire is more startling than the glow of the wood in the grate at home. The splendid spectacle entrances for a time; but we are never weary of the steady glow of the fire on the hearth. If, speaking to you, who may yet make names in literature, I were asked to give you two models, I should name Adelaide Procter and Lady Georgiana Fullerton.

I presume you all know some of Adelaide Procter's poems by heart. "The Lost Chord" has been sung even, to quote Tom Moore, "along the streets of Ispahan." You know the last stanza of "Maximus: "

"Blessed are those who die for God,  
And earn the Martyr crown of light;  
Yet he who lives for God may be  
A greater Conqueror in His sight."

"The Storm" is famous. "A Parting" has found its echo in many an agonized but resigned heart.

" I thank you for the terrible awaking,  
And if reproach seemed hidden in my pain,  
And sorrow seemed to cry on your disdain,  
Know that my blessing lay in your forsaking.

" Farewell forever now : in peace we part :  
And should an idle vision of my tears  
Arise before your soul in after years,  
" Remember that I thank you from my heart."

And the divine thought:

" Pray ; though the gift you ask for  
May never comfort your fears,  
May never repay your pleadings ;  
Yet pray, and with hopeful tears ;  
An answer, not that you long for,  
But diviner, will come one day ;  
Your eyes are too dim to see it,  
Yet strive, and wait, and pray."

But why need I quote from this most womanly of poets, —most Christian of singers ? You probably know or will know the sweetest of her poems and the true meaning of them better than I, or any man, can.

Adelaide Procter was the daughter of a poet. Her father wrote under the pen-name of Barry Cornwall. He was a keen discerner of talent as well as a true poet. But he never guessed that his daughter had written anything until his friend, Charles Dickens, called his attention to one of her poems. It was a strange case of poetic justice. Mr. Procter had encouraged Dickens when the author of "Nicholas Nickleby" was young and struggling, and Dickens returned the favor by discovering that Barry Cornwall's daughter was a poet!



Much wrong has been done to the poetic guild. Its members are represented as continually complaining of the neglect of the world. The poet is supposed to wear long hair, to roll his eyes—or her eyes—in frenzy, to be queer and eccentric, and to pounce on unhappy people and read long poems to them. All the poets I have known are very reasonable people; I have never seen one of them moan in the moonlight or beat his breast and groan—except when he had dyspepsia.

Adelaide Procter was very sweet-tempered and reasonable. She never alluded to herself as a “broken-hearted bard;” she never felt that the world neglected her. On the contrary, she was very grateful for the praise she received. She was modest and unaffected. She was born in 1825; she died in 1864. Had she lived in our time she would not have affected “æstheticism.” Charles Dickens, as editor of *Household Words*, had to read many poems. One day among a mass of trash he found one signed by Mary Berwick. He was pleased with it.

“How we came gradually to establish at the office of *Household Words*,” wrote Dickens, in his introduction to Miss Procter’s poems, “that we knew all about Miss Berwick, I never discovered. But we settled somehow, to our own satisfaction, that she was a governess in a family; that she went to Italy in that capacity and returned; and that she had long been in the same family. We really knew nothing whatever of her, except that she was remarkably businesslike, punctual, self-reliant, and reliable; so I suppose we insensibly invented the rest. For

myself, my mother was not a more real personage than Miss Berwick, the governess, became."

Miss Berwick turned out to be Adelaide Procter. One day, about Christmas, 1854, Dickens went to dine with his old friend Barry Cornwall. He had the proofs of the Christmas number of *Household Words* with him. He pointed out a very pretty poem. Next day he learned that he had spoken to the writer of the poems in her mother's presence. It was in this unobtrusive way, as a lily of the valley lifts itself slowly and fills the air with perfume before we see it, that Adelaide Procter began that career of praying, working, and waiting which has endeared her to the hearts of the English-speaking world. She, like Lady Georgiana Fullerton, was a convert to the Catholic Church.

The name of Lady Georgiana Fullerton recalls "Lady Bird" and "Grantly Manor,"—novels in their day as widely read as any of the popular stories one sees advertised now in the public prints. Her reputation rests on her later works. Lady Georgiana, though she wrote poems, was not a poet. We know her by her prose works. But I ought first to speak of another poet.

#### MRS. MEYNELL.

There are two sisters in England, one of them little known in this country, the other very famous, who have done work which ought to be at once an incentive and a consolation to other women. One, Lady Elizabeth Butler, is the painter of the famous "Roll Call," of which the late

lamented Mother Angela once showed me a copy, and which she liked exceedingly, as all the world did. The other is Mrs. Meynell, Alice Meynell, the author of one volume of poems. Mrs. Meynell, whose husband is the editor of a weekly paper in London, has since her marriage, in 1877, written no poetry I have seen. But what she wrote before that time is real poetry, both in thought and in expression. Mrs. Meynell—then Miss Alice Thompson—owed her introduction to the public to Mr. Ruskin's kindness, whose choice of poets is somewhat erratic. It is strange that an autocrat who generally chooses to praise weak verse should have selected the sweetest and most artistic, if not the greatest of all the woman poets. The famous art critic wrote of Mrs. Meynell's poetry:

“The last verse of that perfectly heavenly ‘Letter from the Girl to Her Old Age,’ the whole of ‘San Lorenzo’s Mother,’ and the end of the sonnet ‘To a Daisy’ are the finest things I have yet seen (or felt) in modern verse.”

And yet sometimes even Mrs. Meynell fails a little in art. In this very sonnet, “To a Daisy,” the word, “literally” spoils a line:

“Slight as thou art, thou art enough to hide,  
Like all created, secrets from me,  
And stand a barrier to eternity.  
And I, how can I praise thee well and wide

“From where I dwell—upon the hither side  
Thou little veil for so great mystery,  
When shall I penetrate all things and thee,  
And then look back? For this I must abide,

“Till thou shalt grow and fold and be unfurled  
Literally between me and the world,  
Then I shall drink from in beneath a spring

“And from a poet’s side shall read his book  
Oh, daisy mine, what will it be to look  
From God’s side even of such a simple thing.”

This sonnet will recall Tennyson’s treatment of the same thought in “O Flower in Crannied Wall.”

It is singular that the other poem, “San Lorenzo Guistiniani’s Mother,” has not become better known than it is. It deserves a place in every collection of good poetry. It is the story, told in a few words, of a mother whose son has become a Franciscan friar. One day a brother of his order visits her for alms. Years have passed since she saw her son, she thinks this visitor is he; but she is not sure. She says:

“Mine eyes were veiled by mists of tears  
When on a day in many years  
One of his order came. I thrilled.  
Facing, I thought that face fulfilled,  
I doubted for my mists of tears.

“His blessing be with me forever!  
My hope and doubt were hard to sever,  
That altered face, those holy weeds,  
I filled his wallet and kissed his beads,  
And lost his echoing feet forever.

“If to my son my alms were given  
I know not and I wait for Heaven.  
He did not plead for child of mine,  
But for another Child Divine,  
And unto Him it was surely given.

“There is One alone who cannot change;  
Dreams are we, shadows, visions strange;

And all I give is given to One,  
I might mistake my dearest son,  
But never the Son who cannot change."

It is something to have written the thought which is the germ of this beautiful poem. The mother whose heart yearns for the son she has given to God,—whose heart leaps at a look in the friar's face so like the look she loved from the time he was a baby in her arms,—consoles herself with the consolation of Faith—she might mistake her son, but never our Lord to whom both he and she had surrendered their wills.

Adelaide Procter is more direct than Mrs. Meynell. There is the difference between Miss Procter's verse and Mrs. Meynell which exists between Longfellow and the more misty verses of younger poets. From the purely literary standpoint, Miss Procter would be called less of a poet than Mrs. Meynell, as Longfellow would be in comparison with Shelley. But, to find the true poet, one must not consider his verse entirely from the literary point of view.

LADY GEORGINA FULLERTON.

"Femmes-Auteurs," as Louis Veuillot called "author-esses," have done a great deal of harm in the world. The sentimentalism of George Sand, the affected cynicism of "Ouida," the sensuousness of Rhoda Broughton, and the utter shamelessness of some others savor more of Mistress Aphra Behn than of the reticence and self-respect of that great English novelist, Miss Austen. Happily, our cen-

ture and the vocation of women of letters have been redeemed by names which are not inferior to the ones that slowly arose above the flash and clangor of Sir Walter Scott's wonderful mediæval world.

Among the brightest of these names we do not hesitate to put that of Lady Georgiana Fullerton. A certain delicate quality of humor has caused Miss Austen to be named second to Shakspeare by English critics. This praise might be considered overstrained if we did not remark that Shakspeare's humor is much less than his wit. In all the qualities that made Jane Austen mistress of her craft—her consummate art, her careful reticence, her subtle knowledge of the varying temperature of the social atmosphere which her characters breathed—Lady Georgiana Fullerton was Miss Austen's equal, and more than her equal in strength and intensity of feeling.

Miss Austen is likely to remind the average reader more of Cowper than of Shakspeare. Her books seem redolent of the aroma of tea mixed in just the right proportion. They are comfortable—steeped in comfort. If there is no word in them that can bring a blush to the cheek of a young girl, there is likewise no word in them to "catch us by the throat" and to force us to acknowledge there are better things in the world than a comfortable income, a bright grate, and pleasant acquaintances. Nevertheless she was an artist of the highest type. Mr. T. E. Kebbel, in the *Fortnightly Review*, expresses that sense of the limitations of her art which is one of the necessary requirements of true art: "To have steered exactly between



the two extremes of undue severity and undue license; to have caused us an uninterrupted amusement without ever descending to the grotesque; to have been comic without being vulgar, and to have avoided extremes of every kind without ever being dull or commonplace, is the praise of which Jane Austen is almost entitled to a monopoly, . . . and only add another to the many proofs which we possess that nothing is too mean for genius to convert into gold."

In writing of Lady Georgiana Fullerton I can add the higher praise that she, without violating the principles of art, led us through this world to the gate of one to which this is a phantom of unreality. Miss Austen would have regarded Emma, or any other of her heroines who might have sold their goods and given the proceeds to the poor, as monstrous changelings with whom she could not possibly have any acquaintance or sympathy. She is always decorous; the appearance of a Constance Sherwood or her friend, Mistress Ward, with aspirations beyond the visible world, in the little circle of her characters would have filled her with uneasy amazement.

Lady Georgiana Fullerton knew Miss Austen's world of English gentlemen and gentlewomen. She, too, could bring around the atmosphere of toast and tea, of drawn curtains and glowing grates, of the comfortable interiors so dear to Miss Austen's greatest living successor, Mrs. Oliphant; but she had powers, and exerted them, which take her nearer to Thackeray—the Thackeray of "Esmond"—than any critic has so far been willing to admit. And "The Handkerchief at the Window" is one of

the most perfectly concentrated short stories ever written.

The purely literary works of Lady Georgiana Fullerton can be safely quoted against that class of *dilettanti* who assert that the Christian religion, when it permeates and directs literary work, enfeebles its artistic qualities. One of the latest of English "femmes-auteurs," Miss Vernon Lee, a positivist by profession, has written a novel to show to what depths devotion to art for art's sake and to material beauty for the sake of material beauty, leads. She shows, with the air of a prophet, that the false æstheticism of Dante, Rossetti, Pater, and the rest, leads to a degradation so great as to be beyond the reach of human speech. Her heroine, Miss Brown, seeks refuge in the barren abstractions in which George Eliot found only despondency. These Miss Vernon Lee calls religion; she offers a degraded world Comte for our Lord, an impossible altruism for charity. She speaks for positivism. It is evident that the axiom that art is defective when it is not united to something higher has ceased to be received by the "cultured" as infallible. But with the school of æsthetes, now growing small and unpopular, it is still held that the Christian must hamper the artist in his higher efforts, as it is held by certain classes in France that a devotion to freedom is always united to a denial of God.

Villon, the poet of these æsthetes, asked, "Où sont les neiges d'autan?" The snows of last year are forgotten, as the pretentious "art," the mock paganism, and the equally mock "blessed damozels" and Christian virgins

of this school without faith, will soon be forgotten. The artistic quality of the novels of Lady Georgiana Fullerton deepened with her faith, and her faith ran deeper as she neared her end. Many of us can long for the intense devotion which impelled her to say: "How few Holy Weeks are left me! Even if I live to be very old I cannot have more than twenty;" but how few really have that utter union with the visible life of the Church it expresses!

Lady Georgiana Fullerton was essentially religious; in 1844, prior to her conversion to the Church, she wrote "Ellen Middleton," of which a new edition has recently appeared in London. "Ellen Middleton" shows the struggles of a devout soul. It has somewhat too much of the sentiment and sentimentalism of the outpourings of a heart that had kept its treasures of imagination and thought close until the pen unlocked them. The story is serious but interesting. Its style is vigorous, but without that perfect equality of handling and clearness of tone which make "Constance Sherwood" and "A Will and a Way" models of good English. At this time Lady Georgiana did not disdain what later she might have considered "sensationalism;" but both the sentimentalism and the sensationalism disappear as she gets nearer and nearer to the heart of the Church. Her art grows stronger and purer as her faith and charity increase. When she wrote "Ellen Middleton" she believed in that chimera, Tractarianism. A future Anglican Church seemed possible to her. There are in the book lines which tell of her cling-

ing to the fallacy of the validity of Anglican Orders. In the last edition, printed early in the present year, these lines have been permitted to remain, very wisely, as without them the novel would not be so perfect an index of the mind that created it.

After her conversion—she was received into the Church in 1846, four years after the conversion of her husband—she gave “Grantley Manor” to the world. It is a novel of character, an advance on “Ellen Middleton.” “The Old Highlander” came next. In 1852 her success had been so great that she published “Lady Bird.” Of the trio of earlier novels this is by far the most powerful. It is intensely human and intensely real. Reading it, one cannot help being impressed by the strength of purpose, the great desire for truth, which the soul of the author must have possessed; for it is very plain that “Lady Bird,” “Grantley Manor,” and “Ellen Middleton” are partly autobiographical, not as to the incidents, but as to the feelings of which the incidents are expressions. It is not strange that these novels, better known on this side of the Atlantic than her other works, are beloved of young people. The author was not young when she published them, but they are books that only one young and ardent in heart and mind could have written. Unchastened by Christianity, such a heart and mind might have run into extravagances of which we find indications in “Ellen Middleton,” and still fainter in “Lady Bird.”

“Too Strange Not to be True” and “Mrs. Gerald’s Niece” are also very well known here. The latter is a book

of religious controversy, edifying and in good taste, with the thread of a story to keep it together. The former is a novel of romantic and absorbing interest in which the author made one of those few errors which reviewers love to discover in order to give liveliness to their criticisms. It was in this book she described, if we do not mistake, the gambols of monkeys on the banks of the Mississippi. Later, in her translation of Mrs. Craven's "Elaine," the sapient reviewers found *canapé* (sofa), translated "canopy," and they exploited the mistake with double eagerness because Lady Georgiana Fullerton was so careful and so rarely fell into those slight errors which pepper the pages of writers of fiction. In one of her short stories, "Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam," she tries to teach the awfulness of a writer's responsibility. She felt it deeply. As she grew older the dreadful weight of her vocation would have made her over-scrupulous had it not been made so evident to her that one of her duties to God was to write. She turned her attention to more serious work, as she doubtless thought it, than the writing of novels. She trembled for the value of the little seeds she scattered abroad on their tiny wings from her full hands. Alas! if there should be one weed planted even unconsciously by her hand! She trembled at the thought; and throughout the whole twenty volumes of her works one may see between the lines an undercurrent of watchfulness that cleansed every word as pebbles are whitened in a clear stream. We have always regretted that "Too Strange Not to be True" is disfigured by woodcuts incongruous to the text—singular monstrosities which,



when a new and uniform edition of her novels is issued by some other publisher in America, we hope to see removed.

Lady Georgiana Fullerton was of the famous Leveson Gower family. Her father was in 1833 created Lord Granville. The present Lord Granville is her brother. She was born on September 23d, 1812. The fact that she wrote French as fluently and elegantly as she wrote English, and that she knew France as thoroughly as she knew England, and that one country was almost as dear to her as the other, is accounted for by her long residence in France in the household of her father, who was ambassador in Paris. Her life was very happy there. Her brother, the present Lord Granville, oppressed with cares of state, differing from her in religion, and often separated from her by his duties, has never lost that love and reverence for her which sprang up in the kindly, domestic warmth of the exiled yet happy family. It was one of the fortunate attributes of this lady, as eminent for her womanly virtues as for her womanly genius, that she was tenacious in her love. No relative ever had reason to complain of her coldness, no friend of a change in her. To be loved by her once was to be loved by her, in spite of all shortcomings, forever. Her charity—in the truest sense of the word—was what St. Paul describes charity to be: “Charity is patient, is kind; charity envieth not; dealeth not perversely; is not puffed up; is not ambitious; seeketh not her own; is not provoked to anger; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth: beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things,



endureth all things." This expresses her charity. The love and friendship, the trust and belief she once gave she never took back.

In 1833 she married Alexander George Fullerton, whose family seats were in Ireland and England. Although her love for Ireland is manifest in many of her books, and her kindness to the Irish poor of London was unvarying and thoughtful, she never entered Ireland. But she knew Ireland and the Irish through the happy intuition of sympathy. She looked on them as a race of martyrs,—as a race ennobled by the sword of persecution,—whom she, the daughter of a peer and the niece of a duke, was honored in serving. Had they not suffered for Christ's sake? In her "Verses" she cries:

" Yes, you can die as martyrs die,  
Sons of the saints of yore  
Who fell when Erin's fields were stained  
With her own children's gore."

She loved the poor. She begged for them, she worked for them, she economized for them. She deprived herself of luxuries constantly for their sake. A friend tells how she walked long distances rather than hire a cab, that she might add to her insatiable purse for the poor. She was not unmindful of the duties of her state in life. She played her part as hostess in her husband's house with grace and elegance. She wrote for the poor, not for the public. The money paid her by the publishers found its way to the poor. Literally, she was a slave for Christ's sake; and, in the eyes of the world, a fool for Christ's sake.

She founded the "Poor Servants of God Incarnate," that the wretched might be helped. She gave all her energy and peculiar earnestness to the getting of the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul into England, and she succeeded.

In 1842 Mr. Fullerton became a Catholic. The conflict that tore the heart of his wife is described in the often-quoted lines of hers, "Mother Church: "

" Oh ! that thy creed was sound, I cried,  
Until I felt its power,  
And almost prayed to find it false  
In the decisive hour.  
Great was the struggle, fierce the strife,  
But wonderful the gain,  
For not one trial or one pang  
Was sent or felt in vain.  
And every link of that long chain  
That led my soul to thee  
Remains a monument of all  
Thy mercy sent to me."

The heaviest sorrow of Lady Georgiana Fullerton's life was the death of her son by a sudden accident. She was not with him when he died. If she could have seen him before his young life took flight the blow would perhaps have not left that constantly re-opening wound which gave her anguish until the day of her death. Her dearest friends dropped from her one by one, each loss seeming to tear away a portion of her heart. Her sister, Lady Rivers, the Marchioness of Lothian, and Lady Londonderry were taken by death. Each vacancy in her heart seemed to be at once filled with new love for her Lord.

She knew to its utmost the sweetness of Christian friendship. In "Constance Sherwood," the greatest of her works

of fiction, she gives us a charming picture of that between her heroine and Mistress Ann Dacre, afterwards Lady Surrey. The account of the first meeting of these young girls is a delightful bit of description. We see the rustic but gentle Constance, a little shy from having seen few people, forgetting to put down the posies of old-fashioned flowers she had gathered for the rooms. The dahlias, the marigolds, the late daisies, and the honeysuckle of her garden filled her arms as the courtly party her parents expected rode up to their house. Constance was the child of "recusants," who clung to the faith of their fathers in spite of the ostracism of their neighbors. Her heart had ached when she saw the village children joyously dancing around the May-pole; but her father, finding her in tears, led her into the woods where carpets of wild flowers had been laid, and turned her tears to smiles by his pleasant tales. At Easter, when the village children rolled pasch eggs down the smooth sides of the green hills, her mother would paint her some herself and adorn them with such bright colors and rare sentences that she "feared to break them with rude handling," and kept them by her throughout the year, rather as pictures to be gazed on than toys to be played with in a wanton fashion. Children would cry out sometimes, but half in play, "Down with the papists!" although the papists were not looked on unkindly by the commoner sort of folk, to whom their charity endeared them. On the eve of Martinmas day Lady Monteagle came to the Sherwood house with her son and her three granddaughters. "Her son," writes Constance, to whose

personality Lady Georgiana Fullerton has given the difficult quality of reality, "had somewhat of the same nobility of mien, and was tall and graceful in his movements; but behind her, on her pillion, sat a small counterpart of herself, inasmuch as childhood can resemble old age, and youthful loveliness matronly dignity. This was the eldest of her ladyship's granddaughters, my sweet Mistress Ann Dacre. This was my first sight of her who was hereafter to hold so great a place in my heart and in my life. As she was lifted from the saddle, and stood in her riding-habit and plumed hat at our door, making a graceful and modest obeisance to my parents, one step retired behind her grandma, with a lovely color tinging her cheeks and her long lashes veiling her sweet eyes, I thought I had never seen so fair a creature as this high-born maiden of my own age; and even now that time, as it has gone by, has shown me all that a court can display to charm the eyes and enrapture the fancy, I do not gainsay that same childish thought of mine. And then Lady Monteaagle commanded Mistress Ann to salute; and I felt my cheeks flush and my heart beat with joy as the sweet little lady put her arms round my neck and pressed her lips on my cheek."

The progress of this friendship is the story of the book. Mistress Ann Dacre becomes Lady Surrey. She is at heart a Catholic and would willingly practise her religion, although all around her have "conformed." Her husband is lured from her by that expert coquette, Queen Elizabeth. Through all her trials and her weakness the friend-

ship between Constance and her remains unchanged. Constance never upbraids her "sweet friend." Her friendship is savored with divine charity and patience. The strength of this exquisite novel lies in the purity and truth of its author's own idea of friendship. Through all her life Lady Georgiana Fullerton knew what it meant; he who would read how deeply one woman may love another in Christ should ponder the story of Constance Sherwood. One chapter of it, like a cool, clear day, fresh and refreshing, is worth all the raptures and the false, self-conscious, overstrained analysis of affected sentiments in which the *femmes-auteurs* delight to indulge.

Love-making is a very important matter in modern novels, and in some modern novels much read it is a long-drawn-out and nauseating matter. There are few novelists who know how to have their heroes and heroines make love with sufficient delicacy. Of fewer novelists can it be said that one would ask them for more love-making. In reading Thackerary we laugh at or pity the lovers; Trollope's love-scenes are exceedingly matter-of-fact; Mrs. Oliphant's love-making is what may be called "nice," and William Black is too much engaged with the changes of his scenes, his moonlight and sunrise effects, to give the necessary attention to the billing and cooing of his characters. Miss Austen's people make love like human beings to whom "money settlements" are more important than hearts. In most novelists' work we miss the quality of reticence in love-making. Their lovers have either no reserve or no feeling. It is a fine thing to think of a man's



heart as of a good violin. It is full of rich music; its strings are drawn to their utmost tension. The master-hand touches it with his bow; it does not give forth all its rich harmonies at once. There is a prelude which suggests the wealth of noble music stored in the tense chords. Finally it comes forth in a grand, increasing harmony of melodious sounds. But the strings do not loosen; they are held tight; there is no abandonment; when they relax and forget that music comes only by sacrifice, there are no more noble sounds. A man's heart, like a violin, must not relax its strings in that abandonment which the *femmes-auteurs* like to depict. Passion is discord: love is a different thing.

Lady Georgiana Fullerton's love-scenes are very tender and delicate, full of reserve, yet showing bursts of the tenderest feeling. She makes us feel the qualities of her heroes without throwing a glare of light upon them; all the high lights in her pictures are in her heroines. Basil Rockwood is sketched by Lady Georgiana Fullerton rather than fully painted; but the reader gets a lofty idea of his consummate manliness. The author is true to the character of the sweet, strong, maidenly Constance in having her artlessly, yet with reserve, describe her love for Basil. She met him in a great crowd of people at "Mistress Wells'." They talk of the sincere and clever widower, Mr. Roper, the husband of Sir Thomas More's Margaret.

"I felt in my soul an unusual liking for his conversation, and the more so when, leaving off jesting, he said:



‘The last fault Mr. Roper did charge you with was lack of prudence wherein prudence is most needed in these days.’

“‘Alas!’ I exclaimed, ‘for that also do I cry mercy; but indeed, Master Rockwood, there is in these days so much cowardice and timeserving which doth style itself prudence that methinks it might sometimes happen that a right boldness should be called rashness.’ . . . Then some persons moving nearer to where we were sitting, some general conversation ensued, in which several took part; and none so much to my liking as Basil, albeit others might possess more ready tongues and a more sparkling wit. In all the years since I had left my home I had not found so much contentment in any one’s society. His mind and mine were like two instruments with various chords but one keynote, which maintained them in admirable harmony. The measure of our agreement stood rather in the drift of our desires and the scope of our approval than in any parity of tastes, of resemblance of disposition. Acquaintanceship soon gave way to intimacy, which bred a mutual friendship that in its turn was not slow to change into a warmer feeling. We met very often. It seemed so natural to him to affection me, and me to reciprocate his affection, that if our love began not—which methinks it did—on that first day of meeting, I know not when it had birth.”

Shakspeare, in “As You Like It,” says:

“But, mistress, know yourself : down on your knees,  
And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man’s love.”

“For I pray you,” writes Lady Georgiana Fullerton, in the person of Constance Sherwood, after Basil Rockwood has proposed, “after the gift of faith and of grace for to know and love God, is there aught on earth to be jewelled by a woman like to the affection of a good man; or a more secure haven for her to anchor in amid the billows of present life, except that of religion, to which all be not called, than an honorable contract of marriage, wherein reason, passion, and duty do bind the soul in a triple cord of love?”

Later Constance says to Basil:

“‘But truly, sir, if your thinking is just that easy virtue is little or no virtue, I shall be the least virtuous wife in the world. Why, Basil, what, I pray you, should be the duty of a virtuous wife but to love her husband?’”

Lady Surrey, who loves her husband in spite of his imitation of the Earl of Leicester in dangling after Anne Boleyn’s daughter, makes Constance indignant when she asks whether Constance would change if Basil changed.

“‘If he did much alter,’ I answered, ‘as no longer to care for me, methinks I should at once cast him out of my heart; for then it would not have been Basil, but a fancied being coined by mine own imaginings, should I have doted on.’”

“‘Tut!’ she cried, ‘thou art too proud. If thou dost speak truly, I misdoubt that to be love which could so easily discard its object.’

“‘For my part,’ I replied, somewhat nettled, ‘I think the highest sort of passion should be above suspecting

change in him which doth inspire it, or resenting a change which should procure it freedom from an unworthy thrall.'

"'I ween,' she answered, 'we do somewhat misconceive each one the other's meaning; and, *moreover, no parallel can exist between a wife's affection and a maiden's liking.*'"

In all Lady Georgiana Fullerton's novels we find love depicted as it should be, with tenderness, with keen insight into human hearts, with Christian reserve. Her characters are not mere creatures of impulse tossed powerless, seemingly without will or self-respect, on a rude sea bearing them to chaos. Even in love they preserve their faith and reason. The marriages in her novels—and there are many marriages—are marriages of reason as well as affection. In the novel with a purpose the reader is usually in the mental condition of the child forced to take medicine disguised in syrup. He will drink the syrup, if he can, and leave the bitter stuff; or, if they have been well mixed, he will make a wry face and be thankful that the concoction is no worse. Lady Georgiana Fullerton's books all have a purpose; but her careful art and her intense earnestness save us from the fear that the "purpose" will pop out suddenly and deprive us of interest in our story. It is of few moral writers that this can be said. We read Miss Austen for amusement, for the enjoyment of spending an hour in a past social atmosphere which she reconstructs for us, but not for instruction or elevation.

In "A Will and a Way" Lady Georgiana Fullerton similarly reconstructs for us social France as it was im-

mediately before and during the Revolution. Nothing could be better done than the graphic pictures of the old Voltairean châtelaine in her castle, untouched as yet by the storm. It is a unique tableau, teaching us even more than De Tocqueville of the means by which the ancient *régime* undermined their own foundations. "A Will and a Way," like "Constance Sherwood," has never yet received the critical consideration it deserves. "Constance Sherwood" is the more perfect work of art. In the quality of *vraisemblance*, in that of reproducing the manner of speech of a past time, in the masterly reserve of power which is the highest attribute of good art, "Constance Sherwood" approaches nearer to Thackeray's incomparable "Esmond" than to any other novel of our time.

"A Will and a Way" has the moving elements of a great historical tragedy. It gives us truer glimpses of that time of tragedies than we get anywhere outside the more honest parts of Carlyle. Lady Georgiana Fullerton fills each inch of her great canvas so carefully, giving no hasty blotches of crimson merely for effect, that she interprets even the philosophy of the Revolution by means of her social sketches better than many pretentious writers. The reader who has not the time to collate the memoirs of the period may yield himself to the guidance of Lady Georgiana Fullerton for a knowledge of France in the throes of the Terror. She does not exaggerate even the smallest incident for her purpose. Each touch, as we said before, has the true color of truth. There is enough matter in this book to fill a dozen novels and make them absorb-

ingly interesting, and enough suggestion for many months of high thinking.

The test of the value of a novel is the impression it leaves. Having read "Fabiola" or "Ben-Hur," we arise with the triumphant exclamation, "I, too, am a Christian." This is the cry which Lady Georgiana Fullerton would move us to utter. This is her purpose. She lived for the greater glory of God. Her works interpreted her life. Each was the reflex of the other. The good she has done lives after her. While there are young hearts ready to glow with the records of Christian heroism of healthy romance, and old ones capable of loving aspirations toward great deeds and daily sacrifices, Lady Georgiana Fullerton's novels will never lack admirers.

Let us hope that the everlasting flood of literary trash will soon become so tiresome to the indefatigable readers of fiction that a purer taste may arise, and the novels of this Christian artist in letters be given their rightful place. As it is, the young woman who from her course of reading has omitted "Constance Sherwood" and "A Will and a Way" should at once repair a serious defect in her literary education.

## LECTURE VIII.

### LITERATURE AND MANNERS.

IF I seem to insist too much on the study of good literature as a preparation for life, it is because good literature pictures man as he is, and often as he ought to be. And the more our literature pictures man and woman as he or she ought to be, without failing to be true to nature, the better it will be for us. If I have seemed to be too severe on a certain class of novels, I do not wish it to be understood that I am a Puritan, disdaining and contemning *all* novels because they are novels. I would have you discriminate carefully. A good novel is a gift of God; a bad one was perhaps one of the most insidious gifts that Mephistopheles,—who, you know, was the devil,—offered Dr. Faust when he wanted his soul. Women are the most influential people on the earth, while they remain womanly. And on you, young ladies, will depend the success in life of many in the circle around you. By success I mean the good that comes from virtuous living. In our time, perhaps more than in any other, true success in life depends on honor and honesty, purity of intention and energy of action. These may all be sapped by a course of bad reading. It remains for you to acquire and to set up a true standard of taste.



Thackeray, whom some of you ladies call a cynic, had a great opinion of your prowess; he insists that you can do anything you make up your mind to do. "Let us be thankful," he cries, "that the fair sex does not know its own power; if it did, there would not be a bachelor in the world!" These are not his exact words; but they contain the substance of what he said,—which is a tribute to the power of the ladies, and an indication of the vanity of the men,—both equally colossal.

The novel is the literary expression of our time, just as the drama was of the time of Queen Elizabeth, or the satire that of the time of Queen Anne. It is remarkable that the three greatest periods of literary activity in English literature should be in the reigns of three women,—Queen Elizabeth, Queen Anne, and Queen Victoria. Perhaps American literature may not obtain its full growth until we shall have a Presidentess.

Miss Austen, in "*Northanger Abbey*," expresses my opinion of a good novel. She says that, in her time, the young lady was ashamed to be seen reading a novel, even when it was a good one. "Although," she writes, speaking as a novelist, "our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary composition in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers; and while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the *History of England*, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, or

Prior, with a paper from the *Spectator* and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens,—there seems almost a general wish to decry the capacity and undervalue the labor of the novelist, and to slight the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them. “A good novel” is “only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineations of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humor, are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language.”

‘I wish, from my heart, that our young ladies were ashamed to be seen always reading novels. They have changed since Miss Austen’s time. But there are many who devote the greater part of their time of leisure to the pursuance of study even after they leave school. And the love of study is growing in our country, in spite of many obstacles; it is not fashionable to be ignorant, and, though the novel is a literary power, morality and taste have not suffered so much from it as they have in France, Italy, and even in Spain. It is your duty in life, as members of the ruling sex, to see that they do not suffer. With that duty in view, let us consider the novel as a mirror of manners; for manners are the best indication of morality and taste.

Let us take one of the fashionable novelists of a certain class, and observe how she,—the Duchess, Bertha M. Clay, Ouida, and their few American imitators—constructs her novel, and let us see whether she takes

the manners of her characters from real life. Now, when one reads a novel at all, one ought to read a good one. A good novel should be elevating, it should be natural, clear in style, true to the time in which its scene is laid, and it should be, if possible, a reflection of good manners. I do not mean to say that every person in a novel should always be in a state of awful and congealed perfection of manners, but I mean that the people should act as ladies and gentlemen when they are represented to be ladies and gentlemen. And, if bad manners are introduced, they should be contrasted with good. Sir Walter Scott and Dickens and Thackeray draw the manners of their characters from real life,—Thackeray more than the other two. Good and bad are always good and bad, both in morals and in manners, in the books of these authors. You cannot, through their fault, mistake one for the other.

But I open a book by one of those “lady novelists,” “who never would be missed.” I find that the name of her heroine is Diane,—not Diana, but Diane,—a “pansy-eyed creature in whose flossy-golden curls, caught rebelliously after the manner of the love-lorn Psyche at the back of her head, the light of a summer’s sunset seemed ever willing to rest.” I skip all this. I want to see what kind of manners this lovely young thing has. I am introduced to her at five o’clock tea in the drawing-room of a Duchess,—for, of course, Diane is English,—and what does she do first? “She cranes her swan-like neck and with a haughty movement hands Algernon Chichester a

cup of amber-hued tea." I may be ignorant of the usages of good society, but I confess,—*mea culpa!*—that I have never seen anybody "crane a swan-like neck." It would be a kindness if any young lady would show me how it is done. If there is any young lady here who can crane her "swan-like neck, and offer a cup of tea with a haughty movement," will she please stand up? There, I thought so,—if you cannot do it, nobody can.

A friend has sent me Miss Rives' last novel, "A Witness of the Sun." If you like stupidity and nonsense, you can read it; it is too silly to do anybody harm. This is the first description I find. It is of a girl of ten,—“her hair of a pale silverish gold, suggestive of moonlight through amber, grew in five well-defined points above her noble low brow. Her skin had the clear whiteness of almonds which had been soaked in water. Her eyes, large and lustrous, were the tint of a spring rain-cloud,—that indescribable, bluish gray-violet which seems to make blue cold by contrast, gray harsh, and violet sentimental.” At the age of seventeen, this paragon meets a young man with the “thin, curled lips which, when not cruel, are so beautiful.” She talks; and one of the next things we learn about her is that “she had one of those full, lissonic mouths which adapt themselves exquisitely to a smile.” When I read that,—I hope you will pardon me for the shocking vulgarity of the thought—I recalled a contemptuous phrase much used by the small boy at school,—“What a mouth for pie!” To go on. “Her whole face changed with a smile as water under a float of sunlight.

The contour became more childish, and yet somehow her expression was more that of a woman." Later, we find somebody else extending her hand,—“one of those beautiful hands whose palms look like crumpled pink tissue-paper, and yet which have the strength of machinery." Now is not all this in bad taste? Is it not absurdly exaggerated? Is it good manners to be continually making remarks about anybody's appearance in this serious and admiring manner? Fancy Dickens or Thackeray sitting through three volumes in open-mouthed, idiotic admiration for his heroines! This constant iteration of description of the heroine's attitudes and her clothes is one of the most vulgar breaches of good manners in novels.

The novel devoted particularly to manners is an institution; here is one by another lady. Mark its taste. The hero is of “Herculean build,” his waist is “small,” his shoulders so broad that they could have borne the weight of Atlas, his hands, “lion-like in strength,” are white and small, his mustache is “tinted with amber-like reflections,” his dark eyes have a fathomless look. The heroine, who is a vicar's daughter,—everything is intensely English in the novel, though it is the work of an American,—goes out on a stormy night to warn the police that a murder is about to be committed. It is raining and hailing; but, says the author, “she trailed her sumptuous satin dress through the streets, as Cleopatra might have done in some old Egyptian night of Cimmerian darkness, and the wild wind swept her golden tresses down on her bare neck and shoulders, white as the fairest Italian marble.”



Now is it natural that a well-brought-up young woman should rush out into the streets at night in search of a policeman? The novelist has evidently done that only to make a picture; she does not care for naturalness. But of course it is all very absurd. And yet some people read it quite seriously, and in future times an innocent historian may take that lurid glimpse of a Nineteenth Century young woman as an example of the manner in which you conduct yourselves in this year of grace.

To find a real gem of the novelist's attention to modern manners, I dipped into a book by Joaquin Miller. It is all about a lady who always dressed in pink; she was a beautiful creature, and she had *such* charming manners. For instance, she went into the great church of St. Peter's at Rome. The organ played, and it occurred to her that, as there were no pews, a little dance was the proper thing. And so to the dreamy sound of exquisite music, she floated beneath the stately dome. Everybody admired her; several priests came to remonstrate with her, but they were so entranced by her grace that they remained to watch her. This is a true picture of what an American girl would be likely to do in Rome, of course! And yet the manners of this person in pink are supposed to be painted from real life.

There is one phase of life sometimes touched on in novels of which you ought to be particularly competent to judge. You may not know much about "society" as yet,—and I hope you may never know much about that world of dissipation, hypocrisy, and feverish amusement



to-day called "society," — but you know something of the manners of the convent school. Now there is a novel by Admiral Porter, of the American Navy, in which the manners and custom of a convent are described. The heroine of this volume is called Louise Morton, the beautiful Austrian. She sails the seas in company with a pirate, of whom she says, after he has committed several atrocious murders,—“This is a being worthy of my love.” Later, when an unfortunate sea captain is made to walk the plank, this lovely creature “saw it all, and looked on, dismayed at the horrid spectacle. Give me champagne,” she cried, “I would forget this scene, if I could, I am not yet steeped enough in crime.” Still later, the amiable pirate tells “the beautiful Austrian” that he has forged notes, broken his mother’s heart, and committed “unheard of atrocities.” To which the sweet creature replies, “Oh, mere juvenile delinquencies!”

These passages are quoted, not to show the manners of pirates and piratesses; but merely to show what Admiral Porter’s idea of preparation for life in a convent is.

This Louise Morton tries to kill the pirate chief. Then, growing weary of “life on the ocean wave,” she enters the convent of the Sisters of the Sacred Cross, “on the Bloomingdale Road,” in New York, although there was no convent in New York at the time (1820). This shrinking creature, who had acquired a taste for drinking champagne and assisting at murders, stayed in the convent two weeks. At the end of that time, she was received into

the community, and became one of the most devout sisters in the convent!

The author of this novel "taken from authentic sources" did not know that a stranger without proper credentials, without her certificate of baptism and confirmation, testimony as to her good character, and a shown record of her whole previous life, could not be admitted into any convent under the jurisdiction of Catholic authority. The time for the postulanship and the novitiate is regulated in all religious congregations so strictly that the absence of a day from the required term of years, would invalidate the worth of the requisite time of preparation.

Nevertheless, Admiral Porter goes on. "In less than a year," he says, "the Lady Superior dies. Sister Imogene, whose touch on the piano was perfect," was "appointed by the Church authorities to the vacant place." She immediately sold her diamond ring—worth ten thousand dollars—and gave the proceeds to the convent. The Admiral's convent has stone floors. But there is no convent in this country with such an expensive luxury as stone floors. Another revelation of convent manners and customs is the description of the white veil the new Mother Superior always wore at table, and in the presence of the other Sisters. The Mother Superior—who, by the way, was not yet twenty-eight years of age—always wore a little silver bottle, supposed to contain smelling salts, attached to her rosary. One day some former acquaintances enter the convent. One of them calls her a "murderess." And, after some similar phrases, supposed to be

generally used in convents, the smelling bottle, which contained poison, was raised to her lips. "She fell to the floor, writhing in agony, and in a few moments was a lifeless corpse."

Permit me to ask, can this be taken as a true picture of novels? Do the good Sisters among whom you have the happiness to live, walk mournfully with "baleful eyes on damp stone floors," and carry smelling bottles full of poison? If they do, we shall be compelled to admit that the ordinary novel gives us true pictures of the morals, manners, and customs of real life.

Pardon me if I make one or two more extracts from a heap of what is called "reading matter," but which cannot be called literature. It is a story written by a writer unknown to fame, whose books are occasionally sold in the railway trains. This "Story of an Actress" was thrown at me one day by a news-boy, who had acquired the art of dropping such books on passengers without hurting them very much. The scene is laid behind-the-scenes in a theatre. The heroine's name is Marion. She is a farmer's daughter. She recites, and one day as she is engaged on a pile of "aromatic hay, whose exquisite tint made a delightful harmony with the curling locks upon her brow" in reciting the balcony scene from "Romeo and Juliet," she hears a footstep. She pauses; no sound. She then goes on to speak "Spartacus to the Gladiators." The novelist tells us that her voice "thrilled in impassioned cadences which filled the ancient barn with wondrous echoes, as if Mrs. Siddons or some great lost star of the

theatrical firmament had come to earth again." Another footstep interrupts her. She is startled; she shrieks; she falls almost unconscious from the hay, to be picked up by a gray-haired stranger; he is a theatrical manager; he says, "Girl, 'tis long since I heard the expression of genius like thine. Come to the great city. Soon you shall receive a princely salary; the world will shower plaudits upon you."

Marion's father and mother are delighted when their daughter tells them of the stranger's words. She starts off with him at once. "Go, my child," the old man says, "and return with the laurel wreath of genius on your brow." Marion goes, carrying her modest valise in her hand. Reaching the great city, she finds herself suddenly in a crowd of anarchists who are about to hang an inoffensive man to a lamp-post. The gaslight shines on her face and the Anarchists are "struck by its rare beauty." She stands up in her carriage. "Are ye men?" she asks, and then in impassioned tones she begins the speech of *Mark Antony* over the body of *Cæsar*. The anarchists are charmed. They demand "Shamus O'Brien." She repeats it with "pathos that strikes the stagnant air like the quick heart-throbs of some heroic warrior." The mob release their prisoner and carry her in triumph to her hotel. A few nights afterward, she makes her entrance on the stage as *Juliet*. The town is at her feet. She receives a fabulous sum of money and is hailed at once as a great actress. The man rescued from the anarchists turns out to be her long-lost brother and the novel ends.

just as of course it would end in real life, by the marriage of the farmer's daughter to an English Duke!

This is all false, as we know. Such things could not occur in life. A young girl who starts out to be an actress takes the thorniest path, leading to the most dangerous road in all creation. Theatrical managers would flee from young ladies who are heard reciting "Spartacus," as most sensible people would. Anarchists, if we can judge by the newspapers, are not so easily impressed. There is no drudgery so intense, so unremitting, as the drudgery of the theatre: no drudgery so poorly paid, no life so dangerous to all the womanly virtues. In the first place, if Marion had managed to get the chance of acting a small part, she would probably have been so shocked by the freedom of manners of the people on the stage at rehearsal, that she would have gone back to her farm, glad to give up all thoughts of the laurels of genius, remembering how the manager swore at her awkwardness and how he called her outrageous names, with a shudder. It is a pity that such views of life—so false and misleading—should be set before the inexperienced. The best safeguard against them is the cultivation of good taste in literature. It will supply the place of experience. The mind accustomed to the great classics of literature cannot endure the cheap trash of the railway train or the news-stand.

In speaking of the morals and manners of the novel, I have almost omitted to speak of the pivotal subject of most of them—of all of them, in fact—love. And on no subject does the majority of novels give more delusive



views. Thackeray and Dickens are robust and honest and practical in their treatment of this theme. Thackeray, who drew his pictures from real life and taught a lesson by each picture, does not pretend that love is the main motive, and marriage the great end to living. Madame Swetchine says of novels, "They generally end with a marriage, like a comedy; whereas, marriage is only the beginning of life." In Thackeray's "Pendennis," in "The Newcomes," in "The Virginians" —a novel which has special interest for us, now that we are celebrating the anniversary of Washington's inauguration,—sentimental love is not the principal theme, nor is it in Sir Walter Scott's, nor in the best of Dickens'. But it is in a vast swarm of novels which, like the Egyptian locusts, devour every green thing. They turn the young in heart old before their time. They raise delusive hopes which sink in disappointment. If the sentimental novel could be suppressed, there would be much less misery in the world. Our young people ought to read, of course, but with discrimination. Novels, like dancing, ought to be indulged seldom. St. Francis de Sales, you remember, compares dancing to mushrooms, of which, it seems, the saint was not particularly fond. "The rest of dances are worthless," he says, "but, if, like mushrooms, you will have them, have them but seldom."

And who, having seen the "society girl"—odious phrase!—exhausted, worn, useless, discontented after a winter of cotillions and late hours, can fail to agree with the saint? If some novelist would tell us the truth, and write out



what the partners of this dissatisfied and unhappy young lady have said of her as she whirled around with them night after night, I think that she would heartily agree that promiscuous and constant dancing is an evil to be detested.

Similarly, constant novel-reading, even when the novels are good, is bad for every faculty. No one who expects to do good mental work can subsist chiefly on novels. Ices and bon-bons have their place, but even the most delicate of young ladies need bread and butter and roast beef. Too much reading of Sir Walter Scott or Dickens or Thackeray, good and stimulating as they are, will not do. History and biography, poetry and art should have their place in each month's leisure, set apart for reading. If it be a question between sitting over a novel, or having a game of tennis or base-ball, let us choose the latter. There is more good to be had even in the dangerous part of umpire than by breathlessly trying to find out whether Amaryllis So-and-So will marry Tom, Dick, or Harry at the end of the book.

But to return to the subject of love. The novelists who write without reason, generally represent two people as meeting suddenly. They are both handsome; that is enough; they were made for each other. The plot thickens. Sensible parents oppose, experienced people warn them that they are fools. The reader hates the parents, and the experienced people. The heroine and hero are both poor. He has a rich but honest uncle, who may leave him some money; consequently, he has never

learned to work. Why should he ? His business in the novel is to love. She has never learned to darn stockings, or wash dishes, or tell chicken from turkey. Why should she ? Her business is to look beautiful. There is talk of love in a cottage, and roses, and woodbines. But there is no mention of who is to pay the rent and the bills for quinine—love in a cottage usually means malaria—or whether he has a knack of splitting wood or whether she has a good temper. Now, without these two requisites love in a cottage is impossible. Let the admirer of the sentimental novel lay this axiom to heart.

The novice who would take his opinions of the way in which people act in good society from the popular novel, and try to act on them, would speedily be an object of very unflattering attention. For instance, in one of the late ones, it is written, "Novirine helped himself to a slice of ham with a grand air." There is no mention of a fork. He used a grand air. Or, "Ilna sailed into the dining-room in her stately way just as the roast was served, deigning no apology for her long absence in the conservatory." If Ilna tried that in real life, I fancy her hostess would never invite her to dinner again.

We do not find these absurdities in the work of the four truly great English novelists, which works ought to be the only novels read. If one wants to find a charming picture, and a true one, of a Sister in a convent, there is Kathleen O'Meara's "Narka." If one wants to find how an actress lives, there is Miss Fotheringay in Thackeray's "Pendennis." There is no nonsense about that young

woman who, on the stage, is "Miss Fotheringay," and at home Miss Costigan. She makes pie and mends her clothes, and works hard enough before she goes on the stage as *Ophelia*, or *Juliet*. There is another picture of the stage in Dickens' "Nicholas Nickleby." The Crummles are inimitable. The struggles of Mr. and Mrs. Crummles and the Infant Phenomenon for theatrical success are truer to life than the story of Marion and the anarchist. The life of the Crummles was a miserable, sordid, feverish life, and even Dickens' humor cannot conceal the gloom of it. The theatre is still the theatre of the Crummles, in spite of the exaggerations that less true artists than Dickens gave to the pictures of life behind the scenes. We find it described in "Nicholas Nickleby."

"It was not very light, but Nicholas found himself close to the first entrance on the prompt side, among bare walls, dusty scenes, mildewed clouds, heavily daubed draperies, and dirty floors. He looked about him; ceiling, pit, boxes, gallery, orchestra, fittings, and decorations of every kind,—all looked coarse, cold, gloomy, and wretched.

"'Is this a theatre?' whispered Smike, in amazement. 'I thought it was a blaze of light and finery.'

"'Why, so it is,' replied Nicholas, hardly less surprised; 'but not by day, Smike;—not by day.'"

Nicholas, you remember, translates a play for Mr. Crummles' troupe, who, as actors do in real life, look on the thrilling situations as matters of pure business. Speaking to Mr. Lenville, one of the leading actors, Nicholas says,—

“ ‘You turn your wife and child out of doors; and in a fit of rage and jealousy, stab your eldest son in the library.’

“ ‘Do I, though?’ exclaimed Mr. Lenville; ‘that’s very good business.’

“ ‘After which,’ said Nicholas ‘you are troubled with remorse until the last act, and then you make up your mind to destroy yourself. But just as you are raising a pistol to your head, a clock strikes—ten.’

“ ‘I see,’ cried Mr. Lenville, ‘very good.’

“ ‘You pause,’ said Nicholas, ‘you recollect to have heard a clock strike ten in your infancy. The pistol falls from your hand—you are overcome—you burst into tears, and become a virtuous and exemplary character forever afterwards.’

“ ‘Capital!’ said Mr. Lenville, ‘that’s a sure card, a sure card.’ ”

The hard-working actresses in “Nicholas Nickleby” and Miss Fotheringay, doing house work by day and acting at night, are nearer to the truth than the imaginative pictures of life on the stage given by the third-rate story-writers. There is little romance about the life of an actor,—and God help the girl who becomes an actress. There is only one Mary Anderson and she, with all her talent, has worked herself to death. Before she gained recognition at all, she had studied day and night for many years and spent twenty thousand dollars. It was not by reciting “Spartacus” that she stepped into a most arduous and dangerous profession.

Even in the reading of the works of the three greatest

English novel-writers, there must be discrimination. Although Thackeray points a moral in every character, it is well in beginning his books to take direction as to which is most suitable for us. But one gets no false views of life from him. He has one grave fault, and this is that he writes as if a man could be good of himself; he makes his characters act from natural goodness, never from supernatural. In his *Becky Sharp*, that famous personage in "*Vanity Fair*" who resolves to gain her ends by selfishness and intrigue, we have a terrible example of how vain human effort is, even in this world where the heart is hollow and the mind corrupt. In *Blanche Amory*, in the same book, we are made to detest the heartless creature who tortures the helpless, who is impertinent and cruel in her family, but who in public weeps sentimental tears and pretends to be an angel of compassion; in *Major Pen-dennis* and in *Baroness Bernstein* the decay of selfish lives. Thackeray never leads his readers to confound right with wrong. If he seems unrelenting, it is only to the utterly bad; he is always tender to the good, and he never fails to point out that the only thing in life, worth life itself, is a good conscience. His ladies and gentlemen have natural manners. *Ethel Newcome* never "cranes her neck," or "throws herself, with a spasmodic sob, at the feet of anybody," and *Philip Warrington* never takes his tea "with a grand air of utter disdain." And where can we find a more upright, true and natural gentleman than Thackeray paints *George Washington* to be?

A reader of light novels may find it difficult to acquire



a taste for Thackeray. It requires good taste to appreciate the marvellous art shown in every line of "Henry Esmond." It is worth taking pains to reach to that taste. Once gained, it is gained forever. Once gained, the meretricious in literature is easily discovered by the sense so refined.

Dickens has not Thackeray's almost perfect style. His personages are often grotesque and sometimes,—I must admit,—a little vulgar,—sometimes, too, strained and artificial. But, like Manzoni's great novel, "The Betrothed," "Nicholas Nickleby" and "Bleak House" and "A Tale of Two Cities" and "Barnaby Rudge" will remain joys forever to the healthy and cultivated mind.

We may not agree as to the death of little Nell; it may be overstrained and long drawn out; it may not have the manly pathos of the chapter in Thackeray's "Newcomes" where the Colonel cries "Adsum;" but the dying child and her canary have drawn tears from thousands of eyes which, since it was written, have themselves closed in death.

Say that Thackeray is cynical and Dickens grotesque, if you will; but you can say no worse. They touch the heart; they do not allure the senses; if they make us laugh, it is an honest laugh; if they draw tears to our eyes, it is because of the sufferings of beings of high purpose; they do not deceive the young by pointing to the prismatic scum on the surface of a stagnant pool and telling us that it reflects the rainbow. This "Ouida" and her followers do, to the destruction of many.



It rests with you, young ladies, to create a purer taste in the world around you,—to help to kill the vicious and vulgar, the trifling and unnatural novels of the day. It seems to me that if one has little time to read, one need never go beyond the New Testament and the Imitation. To-day this suggestion seems too rigid. But, as you will go further, beware lest your taste be vitiated before you know. The gaining of a correct taste in literature will enable you to enjoy high thoughts in others and think high thoughts in yourself—it will be a perennial pleasure which poverty nor care nor sickness itself can ever take away.







UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



**A** 000 674 340 5

**LIBRARY**